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REFLECTIONS
OF A BRIDGE PLAYER

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WITH A CHAPTER ON
'HOW TO BID AT CONTRACT'

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INTRODUCTION

THIS book is not confined to discussion of the technical aspect of Bridge. My main purpose is to describe the Bridge world.

There are so many matters of interest apart from actual play. There is history, current thought, and evolution. There are the laws and their makers. There is luck and gambling. Above all, there is the 'atmosphere' of the card table.

There is nothing more interesting than observation of play and players in widely different circles. Wherever I go I learn something, if not always about play, at least about the outlook and point of view, the foibles and idiosyncrasies of the different sets of players.

The performers are often more entertaining than the performance. The reader who cannot see himself mirrored in this book will certainly recognize many of those with whom he plays.

I have some qualification for this task.

I played whist when I was ten years old, and during much of my leisure time I have been enjoying card games of every kind ever since. I joined my first club at the age of seventeen. Subsequently I became a member of the Portland and other well-known card-playing clubs.

Even during the happy time of my honeymoon I played many rubbers of Club Bridge. My wife and I arrived in Torquay at half-past four on the afternoon of our marriage. I had never been there before, but within an hour I had introduced myself at the Royal Yacht Club and was seated at the Bridge table. We have lived happily ever since!

Later, I induced my wife to take up the game, and some of our happiest recollections of the past and our pleasures

of to-day are concerned with Bridge. Club Bridge is of course on a different footing because the money element enters so largely into the game. Nevertheless, it has given me keen enjoyment, and I have no regrets. I do not refer to winnings or losses, but to the pleasure of the game and the good companionship of the card table.

Bridge is a game of absorbing interest in which millions find pleasure and relaxation. It is a test of character and its wide influence is mainly for good.

WALTER BULLER

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
	INTRODUCTION	v
I.	HOW TO ENJOY BRIDGE	1
II.	GOOD 'UNS AND BAD 'UNS	3
III.	WOMEN AND CARDS	14
IV.	BYSTANDERS	19
V.	BRIDGE STAKES AND GAMBLING	23
VI.	LUCK, THE PREDOMINANT PARTNER	36
VII.	PLAYING FOR PLEASURE	45
VIII.	PLAYERS PLEASANT AND UNPLEASANT	52
IX.	STRANGE OCCURRENCES	62
X.	SLOW THINKERS AND 'SPEED MERCHANTS'	72
XI.	ON BRIDGE LITERATURE	75
XII.	INTERNATIONAL CONTESTS	84
XIII.	AUTHORITY AND THE LAWS	92
XIV.	GOOD LAWS AND BAD: CUTTING FOR PARTNERS	98
XV.	THE HONOURS COUNT	103
XVI.	AMERICAN CONTRACT	106
XVII.	CONTRACT AND AUCTION COMPARED: HOW TO BID	132
XVIII.	CONVENTIONS	175

As in the game of life, so in a game of cards. We must play what is dealt to us. The glory consists not so much in winning as in playing a poor hand well.

REFLECTIONS OF A BRIDGE PLAYER

CHAPTER I

HOW TO ENJOY BRIDGE

AT Bridge, as at all games, we find the expert, the good player, the average man, and the poor performer. It is practically impossible to become expert unless you play regularly with first-class players. That, I think, is common to most games. But Bridge differs from many others in one important respect: there is no reason why any one should not become reasonably good at it.

You may spend any amount of time at cricket or golf, but you may never become good. I have experience of this myself. Skill at Bridge, however, is attainable by all, provided enough trouble is taken to acquire knowledge of its intricacies. And the trouble is worth while.

Apart from the fact that if a thing is worth doing at all it is worth doing well, a good player gets maximum enjoyment out of the game. Moreover, he will find it less expensive than do some of those with whom he plays. Then, again, with conscious pride he knows that he is the centre of attraction at the table.

The poor player must be continually aware of his ineptitude. His own self-respect should be more important than the views of an irate partner or a busybody opponent, so that even though the game be the friendliest possible, his blunders must inevitably detract from his pleasure.

Thus my advice to players is to endeavour to improve their game, more with a view to getting increased satisfaction from it than for the sole purpose of avoiding trouble.

If you want merely to win rather than to play well, it may not be necessary to study the game. You can seek out the Goddess of Chance. If you find her in good mood you will win however badly you play. But obviously you will not win so much as if you played well, and you will never have the satisfaction of knowing that unaided you have done well.

She is an elusive lady, this Goddess of Chance, with a tendency to strong likes and dislikes. She is indiscriminate in her favours and often showers them on undeserving protégés. Her love may last for ever or but for a day. If she smiles on you, your mistakes will annoy your opponents more than your partner. There is nothing more galling than to be beaten time after time by an inferior player. Theoretically, you can lose consistently to a player who has practically no knowledge of the game whatever. The element of luck is so great that this may happen ; but, as I have said, even when it does, the good player should still get more real enjoyment and recreation out of it than the man who wins in spite of his blunders.

If you are the sort of golfer who aims at the wrong green and slices on to the right one, you may win the hole ; but there cannot be much feeling of satisfaction in it. I recall a cricket match of good third-class standard in which I played. Our four best bats were brilliantly caught, each at the first opportunity. I made sixty-four, but I was badly missed eight times. I saved the side ; but on my return to the pavilion the applause was subdued ; I got some exercise, but I didn't feel very happy. Similarly, many Bridge players have the satisfaction of passing the time, but they miss the feeling of mental elation which is the reward of those who have taken the trouble to study the game.

CHAPTER II

GOOD 'UNS AND BAD 'UNS

I DIVIDE Bridge players into four categories: (1) First Class, (2) Good, (3) Average, (4) Bad 'Uns. 'First class' is a phrase which compels interest. When applied to Bridge it causes a stir among those who have never played in that category. Present-day cricket fans are interested in Hobbs and Tate; golfers in Bobby Jones and others; Channel swimmers provide sensations; while even politicians of the highest sort have their public. What, then, is a first-class Bridge player?

Alas! he is severely handicapped. He has no public audience to acclaim his performance; and if he had there would seldom be any cause for applause. The public who paid their 'gate money' might have to wait days before finding anything to justify enthusiasm. We have all felt the thrill of watching the ball go over the rails for six; but in Bridge it is different. One cannot picture a first-class player's bid of 'four hearts' being loudly applauded, to be followed by groans from the disappointed crowd when it was found the result was 150 up on the scoring-board to the other side!

The fact is that opportunity for brilliant play seldom arises. When it does, the first-class player usually 'gets there'. For the rest, first-class play consists largely in consistency. Hand after hand will be called and played in the normal way, and no obvious mistake will be made. Seldom will anything be done which the merely 'good' player cannot do; the difference is that the player who is not quite first class will occasionally blunder: not so much because he does not know better, but because, from lack of concentration or other cause, he has not troubled to work the thing out.

All sorts of people acquire reputations for first-class play, particularly some of those who catch the public eye by writing for the Press. Barring exceptionally unlucky players, writers and other enthusiasts who play very low points are seldom first-class players.

Shaw made a malicious remark when he said, ' Those who can, do ; those who can not, teach.'

Nevertheless, the Bridge writer is not on a par with the race-course tipster, for it is possible to be a good writer and a poor player.

The terms ' expert ' and ' first class ' are often used instead of the expression ' good player '.

Presumably what is meant is that in the opinion of the speaker the player referred to is a good player. One writer will advocate, for example, the ' weakness take-out ', and immediately announce that all the *good* players he plays with practise it. Another writer will condemn it and drag in to support him all the ' experts ' at his particular club.

It comes to this, then : that if you have strong views about some question of policy in bidding, the players at some mixed Bridge club or other who agree with you are first class and the rest are rabbits.

I have listened scores of times to discussions as to whether So-and-so is a first-class player. The expression means nothing until it is defined.

I always say, ' What do you mean—in the first fifty or the first dozen ? ' Now, I claim to be no snob, either in the matter of clubs or points. Some one may say, ' How do you know that the Bridge in Piccadilly and St. James' is better than at Birchington ? ' I do not. I have never been to Birchington. But I think it is a fair assumption.

There are mediocre players everywhere. The fact, however, remains that in the heart of the West End the stakes are higher than in practically any other part of the world, and that Bridge at these points is by no means confined to the wealthy.

It seems to me, therefore, highly probable that the best

Bridge is to be found in certain well-known London clubs where at five pounds or ten pounds per hundred the element of skill offers great reward.

There must, of course, be many fine players who have no entrée to the clubs to which I am referring. There are others with insufficient capital to take part, and still others whose luck is consistently bad.

Thus, for one reason or another, they do not play with the best players and therefore cannot be described as first class. In this connexion Bridge does not differ from other games. If Hobbs played regularly for the cricket team which occasionally honours me with an invitation, he would deteriorate rapidly. The very sight of me batting or fielding would upset him.

I often wonder what would happen if the player who is known locally as ' good ' found himself in first-class company. In every town there are ' good ' players, but this term is loosely used. It is all a question of ' class '. Often they are good only because those with whom they play are bad.

It is remarkable how people who have little knowledge of the game themselves will freely give their opinions about others. I fear the reputation of the alleged ' good ' player is often based on such opinions. Then, of course, there are those paragraphs in the ' Gossip ' columns of the Press, more often than not written by non-Bridge players. According to these nearly every well-known man and woman is a fine player. If you want to say something nice about some one in the Press your easiest course is to describe him as a good Bridge player. Then, again, have we not all met the lady who combines humility with loyalty by announcing that she can't play but her husband is ' very good '. Presumably she means that he is better than she, but that may not mean much. As I have said, there is no term more loosely used than ' good Bridge player '. There is no general test such as there is at cricket or chess.

Many players go blundering on supremely unconscious of their ineptitude. If they played cricket and invariably got out first ball it might gradually dawn on them that they were not much good. At Bridge, however, there is no such guide. One cannot always go by results. Winnings may be, and very often are, due more to good luck than to good play.

Then, again, one can never be certain about other people's success or lack of it. Many winning players pose as losers, and those who are unsuccessful often induce the belief that they are winners.

I have often been told I am a good player, but usually, I fear, by those who are not qualified to judge. Once, however, many years ago I was the recipient of a compliment which I valued highly. It was in my first days at the Portland. I had been playing there for three months, and one evening sitting behind me was Arnold Ward, probably the best Bridge player at that time in the world. My opponent led a nine and I failed to cover it with my ten. It so happened that it made no difference, but it was careless play. Ward turned to me and said: 'That's the first time I have seen you play a wrong card.'

The reader is entitled to think Arnold Ward is not a very observant person or otherwise, just as he wishes! Even so, he was only referring to my play of the cards, which is the least important attribute of skill at Bridge.

This brings me to a point which is seldom fully realized. Many of the old whist brigade and others play their cards well, and that suffices to enable them to retain a reputation for first-class play. Some of them will say: 'My boy, I played whist before you were born.' They regard this as impressive. But at whist there was no bidding, and, anyhow, latter-day whist players cannot have had card sense because they became convention-mongers. Those who are still with us, however, are usually 'on the Committee'. That gives them a certain halo.

I admit that to see a hand well played fills one with

admiration, and that to see tricks thrown away is heart-rending. But it is easy to see. With bidding it is not so easy. A player may be an expert bidder and yet throw a trick away now and again in the play. The latter fault will be noticed immediately. Conversely, a man who plays the cards brilliantly may be a poor caller, but the fact will often escape observation. If he plays the cards well he may be described as good, no matter how badly he calls. This of course is all wrong. It is due to superficial observation. The bidding is even more important than the play of the cards. You cannot be described as first class unless you are expert at both.

I now turn to the average performer. Here I include all those players who can be relied on to make up quite a good four. They will, however, often display lack of judgement, and they will miss many opportunities.

Moreover, many who play an average game are ' wooden ', and will never change. On the other hand, others could and would improve if they were less vain and self-satisfied.

Good players, especially those who play for high points, often assume an air of great superiority over others. In this country the standard of play among average players is reasonably high. It is a common assumption that those who play for 3*d.*, 6*d.*, 1*s.*, and 2*s.* 6*d.* per 100 must necessarily be much weaker players than others who play for stakes of £1 and £2 per 100, and higher. There is no foundation for this idea. It is purely mythical. It arises from the fact that the few known first-class players all play high points.

I now come to a definition of the expression ' Bad 'Uns '. This term must necessarily include beginners who will, in course of time, soar into one of the higher categories. As regards the rest I can be frank, for I feel sure that few will recognize themselves in this category. Notwithstanding continual practice, careful study of Bridge literature, and insistent advice, counsel, and even abuse from partners and

others, these players are apparently incapable of improvement. Many seem unable to grasp even the elementary principles of the game. This type is still at large in very considerable numbers. Some of them know they are bad ; others, far more numerous, think they play a ' fair game ' ; the remainder, and their numbers are not inconsiderable, honestly believe they are quite good players. I fear there is no hope for the latter.

I class Auction Bridge players roughly as follows :

First-class players	.	Fraction infinitesimal.
Good ,,	.	4 per cent.
Average ,,	.	40 per cent.
Bad ,,	.	36 per cent.
Beginners ,,	.	20 per cent.

I wonder what would be the general opinion on the question : ' Is the standard of play in this country high or low ? ' What an excellent subject this would make for debate. Some would say it is reasonably good, and others that it is poor. I would not suggest that comparisons should be made between our play and that of players in other countries. Very few of us are in a position to give an opinion as to that.

I cannot myself claim to have sufficient experience of play abroad, but I have played a great deal with visitors from the Colonies and from America and the Continent, and so far as I can judge, we in this country have nothing to be ashamed of.

The Americans view the game very seriously. They take the greatest possible trouble to make themselves proficient. As a result, the general mass of players in the United States have probably more Bridge knowledge than the ' man in the street ' over here.

Figures recently published show that there are over 6,000,000 Bridge players in the United States. In 1927, 45,000,000 packs of cards were sold, the tax yielding the State a revenue of nearly 1,000,000 sterling.

Thousands in America earn their living by teaching Bridge, while in 1927 the sale of books on Bridge exceeded a figure of 280,000 copies !

In Great Britain the annual sale of packs of cards is less than 5,000,000. The revenue from the tax in a recent year was only £70,000.

Nevertheless, from what I have seen and heard, I should say that our experts are a class above those to be found in any country.

There are a vast number of players who have never taken the slightest trouble to acquire real knowledge of the game, and they have no intention of doing so. On the other hand, there are the few who have natural card sense. The former will never play well, and the latter will always do so, even though owing to lethargy some of them can never be described as ' educated ' players.

It is with the remainder that I would be concerned if the point I have raised were debated. I mean the large army of enthusiasts who are enterprising and keen and who do all they can to improve their game.

My view is that the general standard of play among them is not so high as it should be, and I have been searching about for a reason. I fear that the text-books are largely to blame. There is too much ' rule of thumb ' in them.

The tendency to advocate mechanical methods is alarmingly on the increase. One cannot pick up a book without seeing some new artificial device for valuing hands. There is detailed instruction as to what is ' a trick ', a half trick, a quarter trick, and so on. If you have three and three-quarter tricks you are advised what to bid, and you must have two and a quarter tricks (or is it two and one-eighth ?) to justify support.

I regard any such system as not merely abhorrent in principle but the worst possible basis for laying the foundations of success. Can one imagine a good player pondering over his hand before bidding, and keeping the table waiting while he makes these minute mathematical calculations ?

No one with any knowledge of cards would think of adopting such a system. It is anathema to the man with card sense. It is indeed questionable whether it can serve a useful purpose in any company.

It is just possible that after laborious study of one of these systems of counting values the worst player in the world might improve his game. But with the majority such methods are worse than useless and those who adopt them are tedious bores. I would say that for a beginner to start with his mind clogged in this way is fatal. He will never become good.

Read the text-books by all means. Much of the detailed advice is good and helpful. But these systems of ' counts ' should be ignored. In a later chapter I give detailed reasons for this advice.

It is interesting to speculate where the good players come from. I doubt if there is a satisfactory answer to this question. Bridge is a strange game. Men and women of outstanding ability are often poor players, while others of apparently limited intelligence are acclaimed as experts. Indeed, among first-class and good Bridge players can be numbered some of the dullest people imaginable.

But take the average common-sense man. Why is it that Smith plays well while Brown is known as a mutt ?

It seems strange that the game comes naturally and without effort to some, while to others it is a stupendous struggle.

In this connexion let me now divide Bridge players into further categories. I put first those with natural ' card sense '. These are never bad players, and those among them who take the trouble to master the technicalities of the game, and to acquire real knowledge of it, become first-class players. There are, however, so many with real card sense who are not ' educated '. But they have natural instinct. They can never be classed among the bad 'uns.

Then there are those who have little or no card sense, but who, by laborious effort, have acquired facility at the

game. There are very few expert players in this class. It is, in my view, indeed remarkable that there are any. One of my friends, a noted writer on the game, is an outstanding example. For many years his Bridge was poor. He has now become a fine performer, but it has been through sheer hard work ; he has no natural card sense.

The third category comprises the rest of the Bridge-playing world. This class can be divided into two : those who make gradual improvement and those who never change. Even the former never become really good. Lacking card sense they do not work hard enough to get into the first flight. As for the others, no amount of reading, study, or practice has any effect. Some are brilliant in other ways ; many are amusing and interesting companions at the card table, but they can't play Bridge ! What does it mean ? I cannot solve it.

Some hold that players are good or bad according to their occupation or environment, but I doubt if there is anything in this idea. Psychology and power of deduction are important factors, and thus it has been assumed that experts should be forthcoming from among judges, detectives, and bookmakers, but I cannot say I have found it so.

The successful ' business man ' is often a poor performer. The reason may be that he is accustomed to dealings in which the odds are heavily on him, whereas at Bridge the element of chance is so great that he does not feel at home.

In the office a proposition is accepted only on remunerative terms, and, in certain classes of business, often only if arrangements are made for some one else to put up the money. At the card table it is different. There is no opportunity to float a company with founder's shares for the man who dealt ; nor can one have a bid underwritten. You have to take the whole risk yourself. To the business mind the chances often seem unfair, and legitimate risks assume startling proportions. A man who would not

dream of increasing his share when in the office must double without hesitation in the card-room.

There is no doubt that temperament enters very largely into the matter. The business man is accustomed to looking at many things from the point of view of direct profit. A Yarborough or two may affect his game.

Freak hands will upset him more than freak markets. He allows for the latter, but against the former he feels powerless and impotent.

Then, again, he is always a great talker, and this attribute may have disastrous results at Bridge. Also it is said that in business often the wise course is to put your cards on the table. At Bridge you can only do this when you are dummy, and the business man hates being dummy.

Moreover, he is invariably an autocrat, and that does not do at the card table. You may be a big noise in the City, but if your partner plays better than you, your office manner will avail you nothing. He may not have ' made money ', and his mild comment may offend against your vanity, but it can't be helped, and there is nothing to be done about it.

The prosperous business man is, however, often lucky. Otherwise he might not have been successful. If good fortune attends him also at cards, the fact will enable him to hold his own.

As regards the professions, doctors are usually well above the average. I do not mean that there are many doctors who are first-class players, but in every town there are invariably one or two who shine in the circle in which they play. I doubt if the famous Doctor Watson was much good at the game. One can picture him sitting at the table, confused and puzzled, and Sherlock Holmes saying, ' Elementary, my dear Watson.'

The Services have produced many fine players, so also have the Stock Exchanges. Strangely enough, the Bar can not claim any outstanding player. The late Sir Edward Marshall Hall was keen, but a poor player. The ' Stage '

is also keen. Sir Gerald du Maurier has a habit of bidding ' No Trumps ' before looking at his hand.

As regards first-class players, one cannot point to any branch of activity as a guide. There are not many, and it is impossible to localize them. Some are wealthy, others penurious ; some are nonentities, others well known. There is no accounting for them. They are just there.

Cabinet ministers, literary giants, captains of industry, and film stars are all as clay when matched against the born player. This is, of course, applicable to all games, but, in a sense, Bridge is on a different footing.

The purely technical part is easily learnt. Something more than this is, however, necessary : shall we say all-round quick-wittedness, knowledge of odds and chances, power of rapid deduction, psychological instinct, retentive memory, and, above all, something which I must define as ' the gambling instinct '.

But many men of ability have these qualities, and yet, *however much they try*, they fail to become good Bridge players. Thus we must fall back on that vague phrase ' card sense '. You may be brilliant at many things, or you may just have horse sense or common sense, but for Bridge you must have card sense.

In these days, there are no outstanding personalities at the Portland. Some of the best players of recent times are dead. Others have resigned.

The general standard of play remains high, but as in every club, there are members whose knowledge of Bridge is negligible.

Ernest Raphael is a fine player. If he were ' hard up ', he would possibly be the best in the club.

His brother, Walter Raphael, the racing magnate, is a bystander, pure and simple.

Sydney Lamb, alas, is gone and so also is Paul Nelke ; the latter the best ' uneducated ' player I have ever known. In the matter of millionaires, the club stands where it did. Most of them are very lucky.

CHAPTER III

WOMEN AND CARDS

IT is of interest to consider to what extent women have card sense. In the first place, it should be remembered that gambling is essentially a major part of the game. I do not use the word in its narrower sense, but merely to convey that the element of chance is very great. That being so, women as a whole are as yet at a disadvantage, for, apart from purely financial considerations, the average woman is a bad gambler. Fifty years ago gambling among women was practically unknown. Thus they have not inherited the gambling instinct ; it is not yet in their blood. The woman of to-day is coquetting with gambling, but she is finding it a hard task.

The fact is that most women have a much better idea of the value of money than men, and they have a natural dislike of the flippancy with which money is passed about at the card table. They are therefore not at ease when gambling, and they are often bad losers. I do not mean that they always show it more than men, but the psychological effect of losses affects their game.

Through all the centuries most women have had to struggle to make ends meet on money handed out to them for specific purposes. A woman will freely spend money of her own, or that which is given to her, on herself or on those dear to her, but she will grudge handing out money to ' that other woman ' at the card table.

Herein lies one of the chief distinctions between men and women players. When a man is gambling his opponent, so far as the purely gaming part is concerned, is simply a pawn. He is not a personality at all. What sort of man he is, how he is dressed, where he comes from, his age, his appearance, even his name, not one of these things is of

any consequence. To the male gambler, what matters is the game itself, the odds and chances, the stakes, and whether he will get paid if he wins and whether he can pay if he loses.

It is often quite different with women. Though they may have more knowledge of the value of money, they habitually allow the main interest to become subservient to purely irrelevant considerations. Some will never miss an opportunity of criticizing inwardly, or, if possible, openly, another woman's appearance, her hat, her behaviour or her alleged past or present. They should give it all a rest when they are at the card table. They fail to understand that gambling is a fine art. They are not accustomed to it, and they are bound to lose if they allow their attention to wander.

There are women who have already learnt the truth of this, but they are as yet few in number. If I had to tour the world with a lady partner I should like her to wear some form of protruding headgear, so arranged as to prevent her from seeing either the faces or the clothing of her opponents or of any one else in the room. I would allow her to look at the cards only! She would thus be forced to rivet her attention on the game. Even then she might find fault with some one's intonation, and be thinking what a loud, common voice her opponent had instead of watching my discards.

Let there be irrelevancies by all means, but only those which create laughter and a jolly atmosphere. Men are often capable of indulging in fun during the game while still concentrating on it, whereas to women other considerations are too absorbing. They are apt to be too critical and observant of the things which do not matter.

Thus, in so far as ' the gambling instinct ' is an essential ingredient of card sense, women are at some disadvantage.

Let us now consider other factors. All-round quick-wittedness, knowledge of odds and chances, power of rapid

deduction, psychological instinct, retentive memory. How do women fare here ?

I venture an opinion that they have sometimes a finer psychological instinct than men. I also think that in such a matter as card-playing they can be considered more quick-witted.

Set methods and hard-and-fast rules of play will not bring success at Bridge. There are so many occasions when technical knowledge and power of deduction are of no avail. Often when you have to make a bid or play a card, if you thought over it for a week, and in the meantime read every book ever published, you would still have no sure guide as to the right thing to do. You have to ' sense it '. In such cases I think women as a whole have considerable flair.

This habit of sensing things should, however, be used sparingly—only, in fact, when necessity arises. Some women players are apt to trust too much to this method. They employ it in cases where judgement based on knowledge and logical deduction can and should be applied.

It is true that a player can on occasion sense a situation which is contrary to all reasonable supposition ; but it is dangerous *to make a habit* of proceeding on these lines.

I have often watched apparent blunders being made which have resulted successfully. I have often seen bad play win a game which no good player would have won. Credit in these cases is always claimed ; but whilst some players can on occasion successfully go against all probability, more often it is simply a question of bad play combined with great luck.

I have heard comment such as this : ' You were lucky to win that ; surely, on the calling, you should have placed the Ace of hearts on your left.'

' Yes I know,' comes in reply, ' but I sensed that it was not.'

I admit that this sort of thing is sometimes genuine, and when it is, women are good at it. They have strong

psychological instinct. They are good at guessing what is going on in the minds of others, and in this way are often able to arrive at an accurate estimate of the position. This question of psychology is ably discussed by Brigadier-General Sykes in his book *The Bridge Mind*.

As regards knowledge of odds, power of deduction, and retentive memory, women are not yet up to man's standard. They have little experience of odds and chances. If women had been playing in the days of a former Lord Yarborough, he would have been even more successful than he was. He used to bet a thousand to one against any player having a hand with no higher card than a nine in it. (Hence the word ' Yarborough '.) The actual odds are just over eighteen hundred to one against.

Many women fail to drive known facts home to their logical conclusions. They will make obvious deductions without difficulty, but the further deductions arising therefrom will often be missed. Those, however, who have power of deduction are capable of using it very rapidly.

As regards memory, I think men have at present complete mastery over women. Various obvious reasons can be given. I have already mentioned the most important. It is the failure of women to concentrate. No one who is continually thinking seriously of other things can hope to remember all that has gone on at the table.

A first-class woman golfer will keep her eye on the ball and will not be thinking of anything else. Women who desire to become good at Bridge must get into the habit of acting in that way at the card table.

There are two other failings more common among women Bridge players than among men—the habit of rapid play and the lack of care in card deportment. Most women play more quickly than men, and up to a point this is a good fault ; nothing is more boring than slow play. But many women go to the other extreme. They seem to think that rapid play is a proof of skill, and they impress many poor players in their circle with their

apparent facility. There is much more in the game than many players realize. The best cannot be got out of it unless reasonable time for consideration is taken. In first-class play, most of the rubbers are highly entertaining to lookers-on. But in fifth-rate company, rubber after rubber will be played, and there will be nothing of moment to watch.

This sort of Bridge is dull; only occasionally does it seem to matter what cards are being played. The reason is that in poor company no real attempt is made to bring out the finer points. Very rapid play, to which women are so prone, will defeat this object absolutely.

As regards deportment, it is very important to ensure that information is not conveyed by intonation of voice, or in any other way. Many women players have not yet learnt this, nor indeed have many men.

It is very easy to tell when some people have bad or good hands. When it is the former, they will pass in a depressed tone of voice—an 'informatory' pass!—but when the latter they will show elation when bidding. There is only one satisfactory feature about this bad habit—all information is available for two opponents as well as for one partner.

Women are often quicker than men to notice such lapses and to draw conclusions therefrom.

There are many first-rate women players in this country. If you want to meet one of the best you must join 'The Cleveland'. There you will encounter Mrs. Jerram Escombe, wife of the famous Cambridge 'Coach'. She is a generous winner, and the best loser I know. Miss Ethel Abel Thomas has the reputation of being our best woman player. I do not dispute it. Get yourself invited to 'Crockfords' and entice her away from the poker room. You will enjoy your game and you will probably learn something. At 'New Almacks', one of the 'star turns' is Mrs. 'Reggie' Primrose. At the 'United Berkeley', Miss E. Almaz Stout, the well-known authoress, is a prominent player.

CHAPTER IV

BYSTANDERS

WOMEN miss half the fun at Bridge. They dislike ' bystanding ' and they object to ' bystanders '. Women like set tables. They will busy themselves at anything rather than look on, and any bystander who approaches a table at which women are playing is made to feel uncomfortable. I wonder why this is? At men's clubs the bystander is an institution. Moreover, he is ' recognized ' in the laws of the game and certain of his functions are clearly defined therein.

There are players who are brilliant only when they are playing ' to the gallery '. In London, a few years ago, the late Mr. Seidler accomplished the most amazing feats when others were looking on, while when no bystander was present his ' game ' was dull and uninteresting. An exceptional case, of course, but I am sure that many well-known players often feel a pang when some busybody gets up another table and entices some of the bystanders away.

The more bystanders one can collect the better. They pay no card money, but they pay their way.

' Bystanding ' is often more than a hobby—it can be a profession, sometimes even a career. There are all sorts of bystanders, and their comments (if any) may be good or bad, but, to their credit, let it be said, their judgement is usually disinterested.

The bystander who invariably says at the end of a hand, ' Well played ! ' is at first popular ; but it is soon realized that he knows nothing about the game.

Then there is the man who somehow or other always finds something wrong—something *he* would not have done. At first he is unpopular, but later on he is tolerated for

the same reason. The ideal bystander must have knowledge or a sense of humour. Any one who is able to take an intelligent interest in the game and give a dispassionate view should be as welcome as one who is able to create laughter and fun.

There is the ultra-keen bystander who, during the bidding, walks round the table inspecting the hands. This type will often arrive at totally erroneous conclusions. During any discussion, he can usually be ' squashed ' by being told that he makes mistakes even when he is sitting out.

Then there is the somnolent bystander. He seldom says a word, but often gives audible evidence of his presence.

The energetic bystander will, of course, comment during the play of the hand, particularly when the play is slow. He is too impatient to await his more legitimate opportunity. This arrives at the end of the hand, and one is then privileged to listen to criticism of some problem of calling or play that may or may not have arisen.

Comment from a bystander who does not know what were trumps is often ineffective.

But how often has one not thought to oneself, ' Well, this is a dull four I have got into,' and then looked up with relief to notice the presence of two or three enterprising spectators ? I have known heated argument and lively discussion among bystanders in reference to the play of a hand at a table where the actual players were too dull or lethargic to raise any point of interest. Thus bystanders often save the situation and prevent monotony.

The professional bystander is a boon in any club. On occasion he performs useful service by making up the points and generally increasing the interest by taking odds about the ' favourite '. A regular bystander of this type is usually known as the club ' bookie '. When he is away, there is said to be ' no market '.

Usually, however, the onlooker has no financial interest in the game. The greatest character among bystanders in London to-day is a certain distinguished foreigner. He seldom plays himself, but when in town he will sit for several hours in the card-room of a well-known club. His whole object is to stir up strife among one or two players of an excitable temperament.

He employs various methods, and is usually successful. He will make some naïve remark, at which one of his victims will always ' rise '. Then the fun begins, and until the din has subsided it is impossible to get on with the next hand. He gets more amusement than could be obtained at any other ' show ' in London. It is all taken in a friendly spirit, though the language used sometimes vies with that to be heard on a golf course.

There is at another club a bystander of an entirely different type. In his case the players get little value ; nevertheless, I feel quite unhappy when he isn't there. ' Bystanding ' is just as much a habit with him as with the foreign nobleman, but his methods and intentions are not the same. He enters the club regularly every day, and ' bystands ' for about two hours. He rarely speaks, and is usually asleep for quite half that period.

It must not be assumed that he does not understand the game, nor that he cannot afford the points. I have played with him. He is a very good player. He is also a very rich man—probably a millionaire. The explanation is that his chief hobbies are bystanding and sleep, and he manages to combine the two. He does not get in the way at all. In the particular club he favours there is plenty of room, and it is quite easy to enter or leave the table without disturbing him. One day he woke up and found that all the players had left an hour before.

There is another famous bystander who will sit playing patience in a far corner of the card-room. He cannot see the cards, but he hears the bidding and the general chatter.

His comment—from a distance—is often astonishingly accurate.

My favourite bystanders are Ralph Nevill, the well-known author, and Fred Kerr, the famous actor.

The greatest bystander of modern times was the late Sir Charles Hartopp. He brought ' bystanding ' to a fine art.

The most amusing bridge in London is at the ' St. James' '.

This is partly because the club can boast a regular corps of bystanders. Apart from Mr. Ralph Nevill (' The Bishop '), among the most prominent, as regards efficiency in comment, are Sir M. de Routkowsky (' The Professor '), the Marquis d' Hautpoul, and Major ' Jim ' Barry. When not themselves playing, Sir Lionel Earle (' The Guv.'), Mr. Leo Everett (' The Iron Duke '), Mr. ' Reggie ' Primrose (' Doctor Wideawakefield '), Sir Robert Vansittart (' Van '), and Sir Seymour Fortescue (' The Commy ') are often heard to advantage.

My advice to players is to encourage all bystanders. If there is any question of a round of drinks, never leave them out, otherwise they are inclined to drift to another table.

CHAPTER V

BRIDGE STAKES AND GAMBLING

WHAT exactly does ' gambling ' mean ? It would be interesting to obtain definitions from people in various walks of life. I imagine there would be great diversity of opinion.

According to the dictionary, a gambler is ' one who plays for money ', but it should be possible to find a more human explanation. In its crude sense, I suppose it means playing for stakes you cannot afford ; but this definition raises all sorts of considerations. Who is to say what you can ' afford ' ? It depends so much on circumstances, habit, and particularly on temperament.

Would you say that Bridge at £50 per 100 was gambling ? Most people would say yes, but it does not necessarily follow. I know a man with few responsibilities who has an income of about £10,000 a year. He is a regular Auction Bridge player at £2 per 100. He is not good. He usually loses some few hundreds a year. It is his chief hobby, and he pays for it. Surely he is not gambling ?

And yet another acquaintance of mine (equally poor at the game) is so rich that if he had similar luck and played for stakes of £50 per 100 he would lose relatively less per annum than the £10,000 a year man.

I have another friend who is certainly a millionaire. The normal Auction stakes at one of his clubs are £5 per 100. He is not a bad player, but with luck averaging out he might lose at this club about £1,000 a year.

That is probably less than one-fiftieth of his income, equivalent arithmetically, to a man with £500 a year losing £10 in twelve months. Actually, of course, the figure £10 is deceptive, because the one can afford to spend £1,000 on Bridge, whereas the other probably cannot afford to risk

£10. And yet my friend confided to me that he did not play much at this particular club because he could not ' afford ' to play for more than £3 per 100 !

In his circumstances it is not easy to understand the subtle difference between the two figures, but he was quite sincere. He honestly thought he could not ' afford ' to stand the chance of losing about £1,000 instead of, say, £600. This tends to show that ' gambling ' is largely a question of temperament.

There are some who, however rich, would consider they were gambling if they played for 2*s*. 6*d*. per 100, particularly if their usual stake was 1*s*. There are, of course, wealthy mean-minded men who grudge losing at 6*d*. per 100. They are not worth discussion. They form a strange contrast to those who, with a mere few hundreds a year, will sustain heavy losses without turning a hair. Then there are others who, by playing for bigger stakes than the general company, convey the impression that they are performing a wonderful feat. But in a sense they may be playing for lower stakes than anyone else.

If your partner has £4,000 a year and is playing for £2 per 100, you with your £40,000 a year are playing relatively small points if you ' carry him ' and play £8 per 100 (thus giving the opponents £5 per 100 each). Unless the latter are wealthy men you can be held to be playing the lowest points at the table.

The same thing applies in more humble (financial) circles. In a club where the normal points are 1*s*. per 100, the man who wants to play for 2*s*. 6*d*. is considered to play ' the high game '. He gets a lot of fun, and incidentally is often regarded as *ipso facto* a good player. The effect of playing 2*s*. 6*d*. per 100 in a club where most of the players are staking 1*s*. per 100 is as electrifying as playing £10 per 100 in a club in which the normal points are £5 per 100.

There is no subject in regard to which there is greater confusion of thought. If you enter a club in which they are playing 1*s*. per 100, and you say that elsewhere you

lost £45 in the last rubber before dinner, your statement will cause amazement and even incredulity. Many do not seem to realize that it often works out much the same in the end. Thus, if a biggish rubber lost at 1*s.* per 100 comes to 9*s.*, another of similar size at £5 per 100 will be £45. The difference is £44 11*s.*; but when those two rubbers are 'won back' there will be no difference at all.

Thus given average luck in the long run and average play, the only qualification for the aspirant to high points at Bridge is a sufficient bank balance to enable him to withstand a losing run. Of course, if you are consistently unlucky or a bad player you must, in the absence of considerable means, confine yourself to small points. If, however, you are lucky, the fact that you are a bad player will not matter so much. You cannot lose if you hold 'the stuff'. Most Bridge enthusiasts are, however, scared at the very thought of high stakes. They regard Bridge at £5 per 100 as a hobby for millionaires, something to ponder over in their dreams—as much beyond them now and for all time as ownership of palatial yachts and Derby winners.

It is true that at Auction '100 Aces' will bring in £5, and that even if you do not miss game in No Trumps failure to get one extra trick will cost you 10*s.*, which is as much as you can expect to win over an average rubber at 2*s.* 6*d.* per 100. If you save game and rubber by going down 200, always a justifiable measure, it will cost you £10. The hand will take only two or three minutes to play. There are many more hands to be played and many more rubbers, so that if you allow yourself to think on these lines your imagination will conjure up some colossal annual figure.

Moreover, the man who is accustomed to Auction at 1*s.* or 2*s.* 6*d.* per 100 would feel as if he were falling through the floor if at £5 per 100 he lost four rubbers running, (say), £80. The player accustomed to these points, however, thinks nothing of it whatever. He is merely rather out of luck that day.

Thus it is more a question of habit than of means, and it is a mistake to allow the mind to dwell on fabulous figures of possible loss. In practice it does not work out like that at all.

There are numbers of players who would consider one rubber at 2*s*. 6*d*. per 100 a wild gamble. On the other hand, those accustomed to £5 per 100 are often quite upset if a player cuts in and refuses to play more than £2 10*s*. per 100. They will search round the room for some one to ' support the market ' ; and if they fail, they will describe the rubber as a ' practice game '.

It is surprising what strange ideas people get into their heads about points. If you are known to play high points, and you visit a small mixed Bridge club, an effort may be made to get up a 2*s*. 6*d*. game or a 1*s*. game rather than the normal rubber at 6*d*. per 100. If you are accustomed to £5 or £10 a 100, it is irrelevant whether the stakes on any particular occasion are 5*s*. per 100 or 6*d*. per 100. The rubber is just as enjoyable either way. If a man usually punts in ponies, an occasional bet of 10*s*. will give him quite as much interest as one of £1. In either case, if you ask him if he has a bet, he will say : ' No, I'm looking on.'

Every one has a different experience. Personally I find that I invariably lose more rubbers at small points in poor company than at high points in first-class company.

Some prefer small points at Bridge because, as they would put it, ' it does not matter what happens '. Many players to whom the actual money stake is not of moment have a horror of letting their partners ' down '. They dread criticism, particularly from a player who cannot afford to lose. I think this attitude is often overdone. In the first place, good players are seldom severe critics or bad losers, while poor players have no right to resent bad play in others ; and secondly, from the financial aspect, there is no such thing as ' letting down ' a partner. It is a contradiction in terms.

The player who makes mistakes only when he is playing with a particular partner has yet to be born. Therefore there is no reason why the bad player should feel uncomfortable. He has a very obvious retort to the 'You've let me down' type of criticism. 'Yes,' he should say; 'but think of what you gain by my play when I am not your partner. I make two mistakes then to every one that I make when I am with you.'

The very principle of good players winning and bad players losing is negatived by the stupid attitude of the commercially minded. If their partners always played well, that would be proof that every one at the table was good. Thus all would be equal and, given average luck, no one would ever win or lose. I have dealt further with this aspect of the matter in a later chapter.

HIGH STAKES SNOBBERY

The question of points is a subject which interests all card players. What points do they play? Do you like a small game? These are questions that one often hears asked. There is a certain snobbery about points. 'You will get a five shilling game there!' In some circles this latter statement means either that the game will be exciting or that the Bridge is good. Then, again, 'The one shilling game is poor, but we have some fine players at the high table' (2*s.* 6*d.*). Where the difference in points is greater the snobbery is even more marked.

At one well-known 'mixed' club there are three sets of points: 5*s.*, 10*s.*, and £2 per 100; otherwise known as ½*d.*, 1*d.*, and 4*d.* points. Those who play £2 per 100 regularly are inclined to regard the players in the other two rooms as non-existent. They may be enjoying themselves, but it isn't Bridge.

If there is not four at 'the high table' nothing will induce the waiting players to cut into one of the smaller games. They would rather not play at all. It is beneath

their dignity! On the other hand, those who play ½*d.* and 1*d.* Bridge have a certain scorn for those whom they describe as 'the 4*d.* players'. There may be some envy in it, but, whatever it is, there is no love lost between the different sets.

If by any chance an inferior player from the £2 per 100 set happens to cut in at the lower game, he may have a very bad time. Every mistake will be exaggerated, and every opportunity will be taken to convey the impression that the '4*d.* players' are not thought much of. Afterwards some one will say: 'Well, if that is the sort of Bridge they play at high points, I wonder some of them can afford it!' These snubs will be delivered in an effort to counteract the prevailing impression that those who play for high stakes must be good players, or at any rate must think they are good.

This sort of thing does not exist to the same extent in men's clubs, though in the larger ones those who play high will seldom know even the names of regular players in the same room who favour the small game. I once heard two men discussing the bridge of their respective clubs. 'Surely you must know X,' said one; 'he plays regularly in your club.' 'I don't even know his name,' replied the other; 'he must be one of those who play small points.' The height of snobbery!

I am reminded of an incident some years ago which amused me greatly. It concerned an impecunious member of a St. James' Street club. He was known to have 'not a bean in the world' and was on the verge of bankruptcy, which duly eventuated.

He cut as partner a new member, a multi-millionaire. The latter asked what the points were, and he was told that the usual stakes were either £1 or £2 per 100, whichever he wished. He said he preferred to play for £1, whereupon his partner said: 'Never mind. I'll carry you.' To this day I can see the expression on the new member's face!

THE POOR WHO PLAY HIGH AND THE RICH WHO PLAY LOW

There is very little high play in this country at present, but this is not due to lack of interest in the game by the wealthy. Indeed, it must not be assumed that all who play high points are necessarily rich. There are two distinct types: those who can afford losses and those who cannot. Let us first take the former, and ascertain why they prefer high stakes. There are those who win. Of the others—that is, the losers—Bridge is their hobby and they do not mind spending money on it. They like playing in the best Bridge company, and they are prepared to pay for the privilege. The reader must not assume that wherever high points are played, the Bridge is mostly first class.

The fact that those to whom I am now referring play high points is of itself proof to the contrary. Nevertheless where the stakes are high you will usually find among the company the best players, or, at any rate, those who are well known and alleged to be the best.

I will give the reason for this later, but let us for the moment accept it as a fact. It explains the presence at 'high Bridge' of those who are fairly consistent losers. They enjoy pitting themselves against the best, and if they bring off an occasional coup they are delighted. If they cut against two experts and win a big rubber the whole club will hear about it.

The Bridge as a whole may be no better than at the small game, but an inevitable glamour surrounds the high table. It is felt by players and spectators alike. It is the same on the race-course and at the casino. Thus, the losers get a lot of fun for their money. They pay in the long run, but they can afford it. It is often cheaper and more amusing than other forms of diversion.

I have never been able to understand the attitude of those who resent good play on the part of others. If they

are poor players and poor men they have only themselves to blame for their losses ; but it is the wealthy who are usually the culprits. Some of those who go out of their way to play in the best company must know that if they do not hold better than average cards they will lose.

Yet they will often assume an air of grievance. After several set-backs they will describe all and sundry with whom they are playing as ' professionals '. Sometimes, of course, they are nearly right, for among the company there may be one or two unpleasant ' experts ' whose sole interest is money. But normally they are playing with God-fearing, respectable, pleasant (well-bred if you like), ordinary mortals who do their job in life. Their sole offence is that when in the club they act in such a way as to disclose the fact that they are good Bridge players. No one has a right to complain of losing to those who happen to be in the first flight. There is no necessity to play with them. There are types who when they can afford it will be content with nothing but the best. They should not expect others to play down to their level solely because they choose to play in company which is much above their standard. I fear that in some cases it is the old, old story of wanting to be on something to nothing. It is a choice of two evils. Inferior Bridge is a bore, while to play in first-class company may be expensive.

Let us now consider those who cannot afford to lose large sums. At once it will be asked, How do they manage to play high points ? The answer is simple. They do not lose. Any one can afford to win ! Given a sufficient bank balance to enable a losing run to be withstood any one can play high provided he is a very good player or is consistently lucky. There are players who are both. Herein lies the reason why expert players are to be found in any set where the stakes are high. It is of course possible that a first-class player is so consistently unlucky that he does not win, but such cases are rare. I know of two only.

If we eliminate the poor players who are not poor and the players who are lucky, there will still remain those whose success at the game is due to sheer merit—those who with average cards and average luck win through by superior skill. I do not suggest that the best players are always to be found where the points are high ; but many prefer high stakes because they win, because the game gives scope for advanced scientific play, and because the rubber is pleasurable and amusing. It is not merely the additional gambling interest which makes it so.

It will often be found that the higher the stakes the jollier and less formal the rubber. I have heard it said that no one who is not very wealthy should play Bridge at high points, but I see no reason why the expert player should be condemned to play inferior Bridge solely on the ground that he is not a millionaire. His natural place is in the best Bridge company where he can pit his skill against others of equal calibre.

These players, indeed, have their uses. In every sphere of activity the expert is desirable—essential, in fact. He leads the way. He guides trend of thought, and provides an example for others to study and follow. Thus, even as the great masters influence Art and Music, even as the first-class cricketer fills every boyish heart with desire for emulation, so, also, in some degree the expert Bridge player has his useful place in the populous world of cards. Without him the game would not be live and progressive. He takes a full share in raising the general standard of play. In large measure it is due to him that this greatest of all card games has become a scientific and interesting pastime.

In a third category are those who, whether they can afford to lose or not, neither win nor lose. These are average players with average luck. They often play in the best Bridge company, and they get a great deal of fun for nothing.

Of the wealthy who play for small points there are

various types. For example, one meets the small-minded and those who disapprove of gambling. However rich they may be, the small-minded have a horror of losing. They like the game, and their one regret is that a money stake is essential. All they can do is to make a point of playing the lowest possible points in the circles which they frequent. They usually announce themselves as opposed to gambling, but often it will be found that their wealth has been acquired by gambling of one kind or another. I know a man who made a vast sum of money mainly during the War at a particular form of speculation. He is a regular player at a certain club and is always grumbling about gambling and high points.

Obviously he is not gambling himself; therefore his objection is presumably to others gambling in his presence. This strikes me as curious, for there is no necessity for him to be there. He can easily find a club where the stakes are 1*s.* or 2*s.* 6*d.* per 100. I do not, however, think his main purpose is to interfere with others; he enjoys the particular game, and it suits him, but he is so mean-minded that he cannot bear the thought of loss, and he invariably causes some inconvenience to the table by insisting on playing for lower points than any one else.

Another man of great wealth whom I met once took a different course. He could have been a member of many London clubs, but there is no men's club where the stakes are as low as 3*d.* per 100. Accordingly, he preferred to play daily at those stakes at a small mixed Bridge club. One day I was asked to make up a four there, and apparently, in my honour, the stakes were raised to 6*d.* per 100. I played four rubbers against the individual in question and won them all.

After each rubber, as he was paying out, he referred in ungracious terms to my luck, and finally, when his limousine was announced and the rubber broke up, he appeared to be very upset. He informed me twice that he had lost 8*s.*, and as he left the room I heard him grumbling about it to

some one else. He is the sort of man who would wear the same rose on Alexandra Day year after year.

Finally, there is the genuine anti-gambler. As I have said, the dictionary is rather hard on him, for it states that a gambler is ' one who plays for money ', so that even at 1*d.* per 100 you are gambling !

CLUBS AND STAKES

It is remarkable how little high play is now indulged in. In my mind I am comparing Bridge with other forms of speculation in which there is an element of skill. When one thinks of the large sums involved in Stock Exchange operations, in racing, and in other forms of gambling, Bridge stakes cut very little ice.

Many people who think nothing of throwing away good English money at baccarat on the Continent to the tune of hundreds, or even thousands, of pounds are quite content with a modest game of Bridge at 5*s.* or 2*s.* 6*d.* per 100. On every race-course throughout the country there is a Silver Ring, and a Tattersall's, but only in London do we find Bridge at points beyond the modest Silver Ring standard. In Glasgow or Birmingham or Liverpool you may speculate privately to any extent in stocks and shares and commodities, but your ' flutter ' at Bridge must be confined to a maximum stake of 5*s.* per 100.

In the good old days gambling was the privilege of the aristocracy. If you did not gamble and drink you were considered peculiar—almost ill-bred. ' Drunk as a lord ', was a common expression, and the idea which lies behind it applied also to gambling.

Some of the greatest kings and prime ministers of the past were inveterate gamblers. As for trade, if you took any part in it you were no gentleman. To-day the scene has changed. The power that was once the nobleman's is now largely in the hands of the business man, but the latter has to affect a strong sense of shame. In the old days the

actions of the lord of the manor were not subject to adverse comment or criticism. Whatever he did, he was still treated with obsequious deference. Any villager who did not touch his cap properly was sent out to the war. It was 'Merrie England'. If the lord and master gambled it was *because* he was a gentleman. It is not so with the business man of to-day. At all costs he must strive to be considered 'respectable'. It is Bernard Shaw who has said: 'The more things a man is ashamed of, the more respectable he is.' If the business man is known to gamble his reputation suffers. He may be considered unstable, and that is bad for business. He will get talked about, and his credit will suffer.

It is for this reason that the business man of to-day cannot 'afford' to gamble. Nothing matters in London because it is so big; but in Manchester or Leeds, Bridge at £5 per 100 would be the talk of the town. The spirit is no doubt willing, but it is a case of business reputation first.

Happily, the Continent provides an outlet for pent-up desires. Respectability at home can always be combined with the excitements of Monte Carlo in winter and Deauville or Le Touquet in summer.

It may be of interest if I give the facts regarding Bridge points in this country. In London there are but four clubs in which a regular rubber at high stakes is played. I refer to Auction points ranging from £5 to £10 per 100 or their equivalent at Contract. One is situated 'in the heart of Mayfair', as the house-agents would say, overlooking the Green Park. A stroll up Piccadilly and a pause at the top of St. James' Street will bring you well within a hundred miles of two others. The fourth is much farther on. It is in St. James' Square.

There are a number of other clubs in which the points vary from £2 to 10*s.* per 100. In nearly all other big clubs, and in many small ones, the points are 5*s.* and 2*s.* 6*d.* per 100. Then there are a large number of small clubs,

mostly ' mixed ' where the points range from 3*d*. per 100 to 2*s*. 6*d*. per 100.

Outside London, club points exceeding 5*s*. per 100 are practically unknown. There are, indeed, very few in which the normal stake is so high. There are many provincial clubs in which the maximum stake is 2*s*. 6*d*. per 100, but in the vast majority the points are 1*s*. and 6*d*. In private Bridge points are lower than in the clubs. At ladies' afternoon parties 1*s*. or 6*d*. per 100 is the normal stake.

In the United States, club points are on the whole lower than in Great Britain, while on the Continent they are usually considerably lower. At one cosmopolitan club in Paris, however, the stakes at the high table are the highest in the world. The regular game works out at about £17 per 100, and on occasions £25, and even £50, per 100 is played.

I have often been asked : Do those who play for high stakes carry large sums about with them ? Of course they do not.

Where the stakes are higher than 10*s*. per 100 (Auction), the normal arrangement is a weekly settlement. On a printed card, provided for the purpose, you write the name of one of your opponents and bracket him with the sum lost or won over the rubber. On leaving the club you place your card complete as regards all rubbers lost and won in a sort of letter-box to be found in the card-room. This is cleared each morning by the secretary, and at the end of the week he sends you a notice showing your total loss or gain. If you have lost, you give the secretary a cheque and he settles your account. If you have won, he collects the money from the losers and gives you a cheque. Often, on the last day of the week, many of the winning players are absent. The unlucky players assemble to try to ' get out ' on the week. This is when I get my chance !

CHAPTER VI

LUCK, THE PREDOMINANT PARTNER

OF never ending interest for Bridge players is the subject of luck, but there is no topic on which more confused thought is spoken and written. Some would have us believe that there is no such thing as luck, and that everything averages out in what they describe as 'the long run'. Pressed as to what they mean, the sages usually speak of a year, by which, I presume, they mean twelve calendar months. Why such an arbitrary limit is invariably fixed I have never been able to ascertain. Why not nine months, or fifteen months, or fifteen years, or, as I shall show, fifteen thousand years?

My friend Hugh Elliot has put one aspect of this matter in his inimitable style in the *Evening Standard*. He says:

> 'Many people think that what they vaguely call the "law of averages" is bound to assert itself, and that in due course they will be compensated by an equivalent run in their favour. This is a complete fallacy; yet it is a fallacy almost universally entertained by gamblers, and perpetually leads to the ruin of those who follow it too implicitly.
>
> 'The extent of the fallacy may be observed at Monte Carlo, where the vast majority of players are anxiously recording the results of each coup for the purpose of obtaining a statistical series, which will show them how to bet on the next coup. Sometimes their method is to "follow the luck". If, for instance, red seems to be turning up more often than black, they will back red, just as a Bridge player selects the seats or cards which won the last rubber.
>
> 'Sometimes their method is exactly the opposite.

They will wait until red has had a long series of losses, and will then back it in the belief that the " law of averages " must begin to operate to restore the balance. Both systems are totally valueless. Statistical records afford no guide whatever as to the issue of future coups. The records, which nearly all the gamblers are so busy making, are mere waste-paper ; the forms on which they are recorded are supplied free of charge by the Casino, with a cynicism which is justified by the general superstition of their clients.

' What, then, is this " law of averages " which is so widely misunderstood ? The truth in it is this : that after a long succession of coups the numbers of red and black approach always more closely to relative equality. That every gambler knows, but there his vision ends. The next clause of the law is the really important one, and few gamblers ever see it. It is this : that after a long succession of coups the numbers of red and black tend always to a wider absolute inequality. Do not imagine, too precipitate reader, that these laws are contradictory. The one is absolute, the other is relative ; and I will endeavour by an illustration to show their real meaning.

' If you play ten rubbers, losing six and winning four, you have lost two rubbers on balance, representing 20 per cent of the total. If you play a hundred rubbers, losing sixty and winning forty, your net loss is twenty rubbers ; but you have still only lost 20 per cent of the total. In a thousand rubbers, if you lose six hundred and win four hundred, you have still lost 20 per cent, but now you are two hundred rubbers to the bad.

' The " law of averages " makes it unlikely that in a long series the difference will be as great as 20 per cent. Supposing in a thousand rubbers the difference is reduced to 10 per cent, you will still be a hundred rubbers to the bad. In ten thousand rubbers the difference may fall to 5 per cent ; but 5 per cent in ten thousand means an

absolute deficiency of five hundred rubbers. And thus it goes along; the longer the series the closer becomes the percentage equality and the greater becomes the actual difference. And the longer an average player continues to play Bridge the greater are his winnings or losses likely to become in hard cash, notwithstanding the gradual approach to percentage equality.'

The matter could not have been put more forcibly or more lucidly. I continue the argument in another direction.

The fact that the average man has average luck often suffices for the belief that all men have average luck. Arising from this, it is held that every good Bridge player must win because the odds are in his favour. In support of this fallacy, reference is made to the roulette tables at Monte Carlo, where the bank always wins.

The odds on the 'even chances' at Monte Carlo are about 1½ per cent in favour of the bank; the odds on the other chances are slightly more. It is said that never in the course of its history has the bank had a losing week. Can we therefore assume that no good Bridge player has ever had a losing week?

The idea is obviously fantastic. The whole argument arises from confusion of thought. The mass is being compared to the particular. The analogy of Monte Carlo is true only in the sense that even as the tables must win because the odds are in their favour, so also must good players as a whole win for the same reason. But there is no more reason to suppose that any particular individual who is a good Bridge player cannot lose than there is to assume that any individual punter cannot win.

Is it suggested that every one who goes to Monte Carlo with £100 comes away with £98 10s.? Obviously that is ridiculous. Some will lose the whole £100, others will lose £50, and there are still others who will win £50 or more. From the point of view of the individual punter it is all a question of luck. From the bank point of view there will

be a profit of £1 10s. on every £100 staked, but this profit will not be derived from all players equally.

Similarly at Bridge, good players have an advantage over bad players, but it does not follow from this that every good player must win and that every bad player must lose. That would be equivalent to saying that Bridge is solely a game of skill. Bridge is not chess. The element of skill is magnified out of all proportion to its real importance. All one can assert definitely is that the good player will gain (not necessarily win) by his skill and that the poor player's lack of skill will cost him money.

Thus, if a good player loses he will lose less than a poor player with similar lack of luck. If a bad player wins he will win less than the good player with equal luck. It is obviously impossible to give any percentage of luck or skill, but the matter can be put simply as follows :

A loses £100 in a year. He may have played badly either in respect of his bidding, play of the cards, flair, psychological instinct, ' will to win ', ' mentality ', or any other of the silly phrases used. But it does not necessarily follow. All it may mean is that if he is a good player he probably saved (say) £20, for the bad player with the same cards and luck might have lost (say) £120. This element would make a big difference *given equal luck all round*, but there is no reason to expect such an occurrence as equal luck.

I wonder to what extent it is generally known that there are six hundred thousand million different hands which a Bridge player can hold. I have cut out a few thousand millions in order to make it a round sum. The figure is sufficiently astronomical to show that in the short span of a man's life there can be no actual expectation of either good cards, average cards, or bad cards. Supposing a man played twenty hands a day for forty years he would have held 292,000 hands—say, in round figures, 300,000 hands. That would be only one two-millionth part of the hands he could hold.

To put it in another way, a man would have to play one hundred hands daily and live for well over fifteen million years before he could possibly hold every sort of hand. In the face of this fact, what happens to the argument of those who say that cards always average out ' in the long run ' ? If you bet on the toss of a coin, heads or tails, each time it is even money. But even so there can be no actual expectation that things will average out, as Mr. Hugh Elliot has shown.

At Bridge, however, every time you pick up a hand the odds against it being a particular hand are so colossal that no sort of deduction is possible.

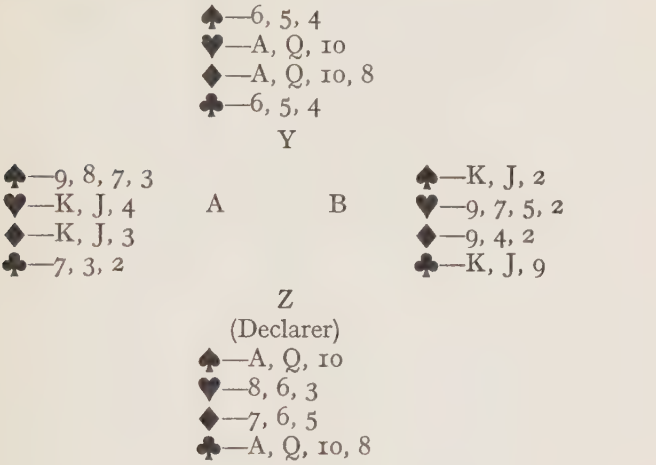
I have indeed understated the position, for I have spoken only of the cards which can be held by one player. However good or bad his cards may be, winnings or losses may be entirely governed by the distribution of the remainder.

The number of different ways in which the cards can be dealt to the four players is : 53, 644, 727, 765, 488, 792, 839, 237, 440,000.

I have confined myself to card-holding, but that is only a part of luck where Bridge is concerned. You may have good cards and lose for the sole reason that luck in many other ways is against you. Thus even when you and your partner both have good cards the purely fortuitous circumstance as to how the other cards lie is often of vital importance. Take the excellent illustration on page 41, given by a continental writer, Dr. Paul Hermann :

The Auction bidding on these hands would be : Z, ' One Club ' ; A, ' No Bid ' ; Y, ' One Diamond ' ; B, ' No Bid ' ; Z, ' One No Trump ' ; and all pass. The result would be a grand slam. But now interchange the hands of A and B so that B's hand is on the left of Z and A's hand on the left of Y. The calling remains the same, but the result of play is that Z Y make their four Aces only in normal play ; in the one case thirteen tricks and in the other only four tricks, a difference of nine tricks, due solely to the position of the cards held by opponents.

There are obviously many other factors involving questions of luck, but I think the figures and examples I have given are sufficiently impressive, and I shall refrain from multiplying them.



GOOD PLAY AND BAD CARDS

Though no player can necessarily expect luck as regards card-holding to average out in the short span of life, there is strictly no such thing, as regards the present or the future, as odds on any particular player having good or, alternatively, bad cards. He may have held bad or good cards in the past for any period, but mathematically his chances in the future are exactly the same as if he had been an average or any other sort of card-holder all his life.

But for some reason or other which I do not pretend to be able to explain, luck often goes in runs or cycles, and where, as in Bridge, the number of possible hands is astronomical, the run or cycle may, and often does, last

for a prolonged period. It is not mathematics, but nevertheless a definite fact, that in certain cases one can foretell the future as regards card-holding.

In every club there are two, three, or four players who are consistently lucky year after year, and there are others who are consistently unlucky. Some of them are good players, some of them are not. That has nothing to do with it. I am discussing luck, and luck alone. I am well aware of the existence of the bad player with average luck who attributes his lack of success to bad cards. He does not come into my present argument.

If I enter a club and find that two of the big card-holding brigade have cut together I would not take five to one if they laid me those odds. I would not necessarily accept such a bet even if, on balance, the skill appeared to be heavily on the other side. At Bridge no amount of skill can compete against overwhelming cards and luck.

The lucky player has, of course, an indirect as well as a direct advantage. It is much easier to play well when you consistently hold good cards and everything normally goes well. There are players with reputations for expert skill who are not so good at the game as they appear to be. I know one man who has won very large sums annually for the past twenty years. He happens to be a very good player, but owing to his exceptional luck his skill is greatly exaggerated. When he is out of luck he makes blunders which appear unaccountable, but this happens so seldom that his reputation as one of the finest Bridge players in the country survives. Actually he is nothing more than a good player who has sensational luck. With his general knowledge of the game, combined with the cards he holds and the luck which sticks to him, it would indeed be surprising if he were not a fine player. On the other hand, there is Major J. H. Montagu ('Monty'), for many years secretary of the Portland who is a consistent loser. He is an absolute expert at the game!

I have always held that no Bridge player can be described

as first class until his play has been observed when he is out of luck and losing. It is then that the real test comes. Some players are good in ' flat country ', but when they get ' on the collar ' they fail.

There are winning players who are seldom extended, and these are nearly always classed as good. Successful people are rarely candid enough to express much belief in luck. At Bridge they convey the impression that their success is solely due to superior skill.

Some of them attribute it to ' forward ' calling. Obviously a lucky player can easily acquire a reputation for ' forward ' calling, but the player who is a poor card-holder has of necessity to be far more forward in calling than the lucky card-holder. His chances come so infrequently that he dare not miss one, while the other man can afford to await the next deal. Some players regard a couple of Aces as poor stuff, while the bad holder who picks them up is inclined to believe he has entered the Kingdom of Heaven. He is, however, forced to pass so often that the superficial observer gets the impression that he is a backward caller.

There are players for whom nothing ever seems to go right. An unlucky player is seldom considered good. The world is materialistic. It considers that if you do not win consistently you cannot be good. There is a sort of conspiracy which prohibits reference to luck. The winning players see to it that it is not mentioned. To speak of it is almost a sacrilege. It is one of those things which is not done. Yet these same players are usually very fastidious about cards and seats and other superstitions.

When a player appears to be first class and does not win all sorts of reasons are adduced for his lack of success. Some will say he has no flair; others use even more vague phrases and speak of his ' mentality '. In no circumstances will it ever be suggested that he has no luck.

It is alleged that there are only three classes of players—

the good, the average, and the bad—and that luck averages out. I give my own view as follows :

(*a*) The good player who is lucky.
(*b*) The average player who is lucky.
(*c*) The good player with average luck.
(*d*) The average player with average luck.
(*e*) The bad player who is lucky.
(*f*) The good player who is unlucky.
(*g*) The bad player with average luck.
(*h*) The average player who is unlucky.
(*i*) The bad player who is unlucky.

I have placed these various classes in the order in which I should expect success and failure.

I think there will be agreement with my placings but only among those few who have studied this question. Some may say that I am wrong in placing the bad player who is lucky above the good player who is unlucky. I admit that it is a near thing, and perhaps it would have been more satisfactory had I used more adjectives and thereby enumerated more classes. Of one thing I am quite certain : the good player who is *very* unlucky has no chance against the bad player who is *very* lucky.

CHAPTER VII

PLAYING FOR PLEASURE

SOME time ago a well-known writer who adopted the nom-de-plume ' Yarborough ', (not the present ' Yarborough ') published a paragraph in the *Sunday Times* entitled ' The Fascination of Cards '. He said that at his hotel in Le Touquet he found Bridge tables all over the lounge and famous men playing six-pack bezique, while at the Casino across the road hundreds were risking francs on the turn of a card. He discussed this fascination of cards with ' one of our industrial magnates ', and the latter appears to have held forth as follows :

> ' There are a few who deliberately try to make money out of card games, but they are not worth considering. The great majority find card-playing a happy relaxation from the ordinary duties of life, and they do not really mind whether they win or lose, because they play for stakes they can afford. They forget for the time being the problems that beset them, and are consequently all the more fitted to face them when they return to them.'

' Yarborough ' said these words had a common-sense ring about them, but I doubt if he gave the matter more than superficial reflection. Few indeed will disagree with some of the sentiments expressed, but if we eliminate the platitudes it will be found that the ' meat ' is contained first in the words ' the great majority do not really mind whether they win or lose ', and secondly in the suggestion that most players do not try to win money at cards.

With all respect to ' Yarborough's ' industrial friend, I can only describe this as highfalutin nonsense. ' Yarborough ' did not state whether either of them played

Bridge or had a flutter in the Casino ; but if they did, I suggest that they deliberately tried to win and that they minded whether they won or lost. If, however, they did not play, they must have felt very much out of their element among all the publicans and sinners who frequent this luxurious gambling resort.

This reminds me that among all classes of players you will find the humbugs who say they ' only play for pleasure '. Recently I met a fellow-member of a well-known London club where the points are *2s. 6d.* per 100. The good folk who enjoy their game there are, without exception, in the public service or retired from it. I asked my friend did he ever play there. ' Oh, no,' he said. ' I only play as a recreation.' What on earth did he mean ?

Is it suggested that all who play bridge for more than (say) *6d.* per 100 do not find recreation and pleasure in it ? The gambling or money interest is, of course, part of the amusement. The extent to which it is a part depends on individual temperament. To many, low points suffice to provide the maximum of enjoyment ; to others, a flutter or gamble is essential to their pleasure. But whether the stakes are high or low, there is no question that the financial interest is largely predominant.

If a man wins four rubbers and is asked afterwards how he got on he will almost invariably mention the amount of money won. If it was at 1*s.* per 100 he will say : ' I did jolly well ; I won fourteen shillings.' If it was at £1 per 100, he will proudly announce that he won £14. Criticism and unfriendly discussion at the table are often engendered by financial considerations, and the people who say they play for pleasure are usually the worst offenders. The only definite thing one can say about this type is that they certainly do not play for other people's pleasure. The rubber is always jollier in their absence.

Here is an example of comment to which, I presume, these purists are accustomed : ' Partner, I am sorry you doubled their " Four Spades " and got them down two

hundred. We should not have got " Five Hearts ", but if you had called it you would have had a most interesting hand to play, and it would have made a better game of it. I only play for pleasure, and I should have enjoyed watching you go down.'

Personally I have never heard this type of comment ; but then, I suppose, it is because the people I play with do not play for pleasure !

BRIDGE OF SIGHS

This brings me to the consideration—as true as it is remarkable—that, with one or two exceptions, the higher the points the more irresponsible ostensibly is the game. At some of the smaller ' mixed ' clubs, players sit tightly jammed for hours on end in dead silence. Bids are made in a whisper. There are none but set tables. There are no bystanders and conversation of any sort is taboo. At 6*d*. and 1*s*. per 100 one would think the very lives of the players depended on the cards they play. In some of these places there is even a large ' Silence ' sign prominently displayed.

Club Bridge at high points presents a remarkable contrast. Every sort of irrelevant discussion sometimes goes on during the bidding and play. Bystanders join in with remarks and comments, and often one or two members will be standing near discussing politics, religion, or other topics, and trying to induce the players to give their views thereon.

This is the sort of Bridge that is amusing. I often wish I could induce some of the sour-faced people who ' play for pleasure ' to join in at it. To play well in such an environment is, of course, an acquired habit, but it is one well worth acquiring. Most players could get used to it if they tried. A silent Bridge-room is the most dull and boring institution imaginable.

Indeed, the atmosphere of the small Bridge club is often

terrifying in its severity. Recently my wife and I dined with friends, and we were asked to ' come on to the club '. I got into trouble at once. I cut into a table among strangers, and when it was my turn to call, instead of saying, ' No Bid ', I said, ' Nothing.' The lady on my left turned to me at once and said, ' What do you mean ? ' I could tell from her manner that she did not approve. I apologized at once and said that I meant ' No Bid ' ; and thereafter I was very careful to be ' correct '. There is of course a clause in the book of rules under the heading ' Etiquette ' which says that the expression ' No Bid ' should be used and no other. No doubt it was inserted by some very pompous draughtsman. If you want to cheat during the bidding the way to do so is to vary your voice. In that way it is quite easy to convey to your partner that you have nothing or that you have a dubious bid or that your hand is strong. The use of expressions other than ' No Bid ' is proof positive that you are not cheating. It could only be of advantage if you have a code with your partner, and even then such a method would not be employed because it would be too obvious. There are so many subtle ways that are not open to detection.

At high points no one attempts to follow formal official methods of expression. Nearly every player has a different way of passing.

Here are some of them : ' Pass along ' ; ' I collapse ' ; ' I've finished ' ; ' Nothing more ' ; ' By me ' (in a strong American accent) ; ' That suits me ' ; ' I have nothing to say ' ; ' Not another word ' ; ' No further bid ' ; ' I shan't double ' ; ' Nothing here '.

Sir Mathew (' Scatters ') Wilson has an amusing habit. When his opponents have bid and it is his turn he sometimes says : ' Well, boys, this is not easy.' He then produces a coin from his pocket and allows it to fall on the table. We all know what is coming. Whether it is heads or tails he will stare at the coin and say : ' Damn ! I pass.'

Hugh Elliot will often turn to an opponent who is

hesitating and say with an affectation of generosity, ' Play whatever you like.'

THE PROFESSIONAL PLAYER

Has any one ever met a professional Bridge player ? I should like to have a full-size photograph, together with a description of his appearance, manners, and habits. But seriously, what is this epithet intended to convey ? It has no connexion with the same word used to denote highly-honoured occupations. It is a term of opprobrium. It cannot merely mean some one who wins money at Bridge, for that definition would include a vast number of people of all types and classes. Is it, then, a question of occupation or of means ?

If a man is a regular player and has no occupation is he *ipso facto* a ' pro ' ? Or if he is not well-off and plays for stakes which appear in his circumstances to be high, is that a test ? There is a tendency to describe as professional any one whose skill is superior to those among whom he plays, provided always that he is not a very rich man. Thus, in the absence of wealth any good player is liable to be considered a professional.

Take the case of a City man, or some one who has private means. If he has an occasional bet, and wins, is he a professional backer ? If he studies stocks and shares and comes out alive, is he a professional operator ? If he habitually bets at golf during his week-end games, and is on the whole successful, is he a professional golfer ? Supposing he wins at Bridge one day and loses at racing, is he for that day a professional Bridge player and for the next day perhaps a professional backer ? Or is a man a ' pro ' if he is a consistent winner at any form of activity outside his normal sphere ? I have my own answer to all these questions.

In my view, neither skill nor lack of occupation, nor the question of means, enters into the matter. If the term is

to be used at all, ' professionalism ' at Bridge is a question of manner and behaviour.

I exclude neither the wealthy nor even the bad players. It depends entirely on how they behave.

There are players of small means who have no occupation. They have knowledge and skill, and if they hold average cards they win consistently. But that does not necessarily make them professionals. There are wealthy men with business and other interests to whom the term ' pro ' could more reasonably be applied. They sometimes talk superciliously about professional Bridge players, but they are often themselves the worst offenders.

At Bridge, as at all forms of activity where there is a financial interest, ' money talks ', and the question of gain and loss must inevitably be prominent. But there are right ways of losing money and of winning it. If we must use the term, I would describe as ' professional ' he or she who is out to win *at all costs*. There are various methods employed by those whose sole interest in the game is to make money out of it.

There is the man who will refuse to make up a four, on the ground that he has only an hour before dinner, and therefore if he lost a rubber he might not have time to get his money back ; or he will break up a four for the sole reason that he feels out of luck at the moment.

There are regular Bridge players, consistent winners, who will refuse to play after they have lost three rubbers running, though at other times they will play ten, twelve, or even fifteen rubbers at a sitting. The idea is to give others every chance of losing to them when they are in luck but no opportunity of winning from them when they are not.

Then there is the man who plays daily at his club in London, but who, when away for a holiday, will not play a single rubber. The game he can get at smaller points does not interest him. He has a rest from serious work. He might have a run of luck at these points, and that would

be fatal, for a bad run at higher points might follow on his return to town. This type stamp themselves as having none but financial interest in the game. When in their own club they will never make up a four at points lower than those to which they are accustomed. They won't do it even as a favour. It isn't business.

Then there is the bad loser and the bad winner. Metaphorically speaking, he clenches his teeth when he is losing and makes things generally unpleasant for every one, while when he is winning he is aggressive and gloating. At no time does he add anything to the amenities of the game. The greedy look of the winner and the sour face of the loser denote the professional mind.

Another test occurs to me. On a recent occasion, in spite of holding the worst cards possible, I won four rubbers running. I never once made a bid, and I had no real interest in any card which I had to play. Most of the time I found myself putting my cards down on the table as dummy.

I made some casual remark to the effect that from my point of view the rubbers had been dull. A bystander immediately ' jumped down my throat '. ' You won them all,' he said. ' What more do you want ? ' I am as keen to win as any one, but I maintain that the attitude of mind disclosed by this remark is commercial—in fact, professional.

Finally, there is the man who is continually calling for fresh cards. This is a bad habit. It is indulged in only by those whose sole interest in the game is financial.

The various types of players I have mentioned are to be found everywhere, equally at low stakes as at high points. Whether rich or poor, the player with the serious demeanour who never smiles is a bore in any card-room. It is easy to distinguish those who are playing for money and pleasure from those who are playing for money alone.

CHAPTER VIII

PLAYERS PLEASANT AND UNPLEASANT

CLUB Bridge players are often peculiar people; nevertheless, club Bridge has many advantages. The most important is that one can enter or leave the card-room at will without explanation or reference to any one. There is, in my view, nothing more boring than to sit down to a set rubber of Bridge with the knowledge that, whether you are enjoying the game or not, you must go on playing rubber after rubber for two or three hours ('enthusiasts' often expect you to play even longer). I bow to no one in enthusiasm for the game. Those to whom I am referring are not really enthusiasts: they are either naturally hectic and restless or inveterate gamblers.

Sometimes the gambling element predominates; but, whatever the points, money should not be the sole interest. What matters is the game itself. One can often get as much fun in watching as in playing. Personally, after three or four set rubbers I always want to go home. But if I am allowed to sit out now and again I often find a late sitting, particularly at the week-end, thoroughly enjoyable.

But club Bridge has its drawbacks. The chief of these is the amazing attitude adopted by some players towards their partners. Normally, if you are a very good player you escape unscathed, though I have known even experts hauled over the coals by players who are quite ignorant of the finer points of the game. When you take a chance which is, say, three to one on, and it happens to go wrong, it is quite easy for a partner who has not the remotest idea of odds to abuse you for playing badly.

He will probably not be present when the three other occasions arise, and even if he were he would not see the point. If, notwithstanding his inevitable halo, criticism of this sort can be levelled at the first-class player, it is

obvious that the average player and the nervous beginner must often go through terrible ordeals. If, every time they make a mistake, they are treated as criminals, Bridge for them can hardly be a game at all. Sometimes they have even to put up with invective from an irate partner when they have made no mistake at all, for often they are not sufficiently versed in the game to be able to give reasons for their play and to point out that, in spite of a particular result, they were theoretically right.

Many ' mixed ' Bridge clubs have been broken up altogether as a result of continuous display of bad temper. Even in those which flourish there are cliques. Mrs. Smith will not play at the same table as Mrs. Brown, and so on. Recently a friend of mine decided to join one of these clubs. She was told that there were four rooms—6*d*., 1*s*., 2*s*. 6*d*., and 5*s*. She wanted to ascertain which was the ' nicest ' game. She did not mind what points she played. She raised this question with three friends at different times. The first said : ' My dear, play in the sixpenny room—the others are awful.' The second said : ' The sixpenny room is the worst. I had to give it up. You will like the shilling players.' The third said : ' You will like the five shilling game best ; if you make a mistake they are fairly reasonable ; the half-crown people are the worst ; even in the shilling and sixpenny rooms, they have dreadful rows.' This discloses a state of affairs which, to put it mildly, is highly regrettable.

There is another London club where there are the same four sets of points. The worst offenders as regards manners are undoubtedly in what is called ' the 6*d*. room '. It is a terrifying place. It is said that the ' 6*d*. players ' arrive in Rolls-Royces and the 1*s*. players in smaller cars. The 2*s*. 6*d*. people come by bus, and the 5*s*. lot walk.

Whether it is because they get some healthy exercise or not, there is no question that card deportment in the 5*s*. room is on a higher level than in any other part of the club. Strangely enough, this is what one would expect. At the

best-known clubs where they play for high points, e.g. £5 or £10 per 100, the 'atmosphere' is good and players with few exceptions behave like human beings.

What a pity it is that, unlike chess, Bridge is a game in which a money stake is essential. Whatever the points, whether high or low, the fact that there is money to be lost or won must inevitably affect the attitude of those taking part. In this respect Bridge is in a different category to other games. At *chemin de fer* a player who is out of luck will lose his money with good grace. The element of skill is negligible. The player is on his own, and he has no one to blame but chance.

At poker, bezique, and picquet, where there is a definite element of skill, the loser can but sit and suffer. He can 'grouse' about his luck. No one minds that. He cannot 'get at' anybody about it. Unfortunately, Bridge is a partnership game, and therefore the bad loser can work off his annoyance on to his partner.

There are types who when luck is out and things go wrong are never satisfied unless they can blame some one for it. At Bridge they have a ready victim—their partner. Whatever happens, it is always their partner's fault. Whether in the right or in the wrong, the bad loser finds relief for his feelings in attacking his partner. Sometimes he will say nothing at the time, but when cut out he will go round the room whispering about the awful things which have happened to him. When you have listened to a full account of what took place, including details of the hands, you will be asked what you think of the man who let him down. The best thing is to say: 'Of course he has no idea of the game.' This will satisfy the grouser and he will at once go off to tell some one else.

THE BAD LOSER

Every Bridge player knows the bad loser. It is impossible to get away from him. Even at private Bridge

he makes his presence felt, though here there is less opportunity for outward display of bad manners. Though he may show no sign of temper, and may even refrain from comment on his partner's play, unconsciously he creates an ' atmosphere ' which can be sensed.

In clubs it is impossible to play regularly with the same set without becoming aware of the fact that some are good losers and some are not. It is by no means always a question of money, but rather of temperament and character. It does not necessarily follow that the man who is hard up is a bad loser ; on the contrary, one finds that many to whom the points are of moment will sustain heavy losses with grace, while others when playing for stakes of no consequence are flagrant delinquents.

We must never lose sight of the fact that Bridge is a game. The average man, whether he has the disadvantage or advantage, as the case may be, of being a duke or a dustman, sits down to a rubber for the pleasure of the thing ; he enjoys the gambling element inherent in any game of cards ; and he enjoys the contest of wits, and of course he hopes to win.

Whether the points are 6*d.* per 100 or £5 per 100 is irrelevant. There are lots of players who cannot afford consistent losses at 6*d.* per 100 and there are many who play £5 per 100 who are inclined to regard losses as inconvenient. Assuming you are playing for stakes to which you are accustomed the question arises, irrespective of their size, whether or not you are a good loser. Do you add anything to the enjoyment of those with whom you play, or are you one of those who are pleasant when winning other people's money and objectionable when losing ?

If you are one of the latter, you deserve to be ostracized ; but in practice does that happen ? Normally it does not, and I will give the reason. *Almost invariably, bad losers are to be found among the consistent winners.* This sounds paradoxical but it is true. The fact is that unpleasant people who are unlucky get accustomed to losses, and

therefore take them as a matter of course, while the lucky ones are so astonished when they lose that the worst in them comes out.

There are many books with such quaint titles as *The Laws of Chance* and so on. They go into minute mathematical detail ; but when you have read them all you will still have to come down to earth and admit that some people are consistently lucky and that others are the reverse. The plain fact is that there is no such thing as a law of chance. ' Luck ' is quite as great an enigma as the riddle of the universe.

In practice, therefore, what happens ? A man who is born lucky at cards will normally appear to be a delightful companion. But it does not necessarily follow that he is really a pleasant player. In the ' higher ' Bridge circles, champagne all round, subject to the donor having won (say) £100, will create an impression of generosity and good nature. Often it is there, but when it is not I prefer to order my own whisky-and-soda. With some lucky players a remarkable change comes over the scene when on infrequent occasions good fortune departs. There is abuse and recrimination. Every one is made to feel uncomfortable, the reason being that the culprit is not winning his usual amount. But people only think he is out of sorts for once, and they remember the champagne. The same thing applies in circles where the points are low. A charming manner when things are going well, combined with an occasional offer of a glass of beer, will have a similar effect.

PAX VOBISCUM

Thus, a man who assumes an altruistic manner when winning other people's money often achieves popularity. He has many opportunities of showing good grace, and the fact will stand him in good stead. The moral is that if you are an unpleasant person and a consistently lucky player, be careful to be a good winner. The fact that you are a bad loser may then be overlooked.

Bad manners at the table are, however, the bane of Bridge; it is the duty of all players to discountenance them in every possible way. It is difficult to sympathize with any one who permits himself to be the butt of a bullying partner. Keep the peace by all means, if you can; but there are limits. Abject weakness and lack of moral fibre will only make things worse. The attitude that I personally have consistently adopted is that of the animal whose keeper put up a notice which read: 'This animal is vicious. He is apt to defend himself when attacked.'

The man who, whether winner or loser, continually indulges in abusive criticism of his partner invariably has certain definable characteristics:

(1) He is seldom a good player—never first class. (Any player who does not get the best out of his partner cannot be described as 'first class'.)

(2) He always judges by a particular result—often a misleading method.

(3) He never listens to any explanation, and invariably endeavours to cover up his own mistakes by making out that anything wrong he may have done was due to bad play by his partner.

(4) His vocal organs are usually the only strong point about him.

Putting it on its lowest grounds, behaviour such as I have described is bad business, because it is inevitable that the play of the bully's partner will deteriorate as the rubber proceeds. It would appear that some players assume that others have come into the card-room for the sole purpose of making money for them when they are their partners and of losing it to them when they are their opponents. Their attitude shows that the money element is their sole interest. They ignore the fact that the majority of players cut in because they love the game, because they want a pleasant rubber, and, of course, if they win, so much the better.

There is all the difference between abusive criticism and

friendly discussion. This latter is easily distinguishable from the fault-finding, rancour, and invective of the bad loser. One often hears a player saying at the start of a rubber : ' Now, no post-mortems, please.' If he means no vulgar abuse, well and good ; but if he does not desire any discussion to take place after an interesting hand, then he ought not to play at all. Quite half the interest of the game is removed if there is never any debate or attempt to visualize what would have happened if there had been different calling or play. Such discussions are instructive, and if conducted in a proper spirit can be interesting and pleasurable.

Only those with no real interest in the game, as a game, can sit stolidly at a table and never say a word about the play or raise any point of controversy.

But when discussion is conducted on wrong lines, the player who is criticized feels that he is being made out to be a fool. That is often fatal, for few have so little vanity that they can refrain from a spirited defence. At Bridge it is easy to take the wrong view. When mistakes occur, discussion is not merely legitimate, it is desirable ; but it should be conducted with altruism and in a friendly spirit. This is my message : Never attack your partner ; never blame him. You cannot offend if it is clear that the motive of your comment is interest in the game.

CARDS AND THE MAN

I have said there are club players who apparently assume that their fellow-members have been born into the world solely for the purpose of making money for them when they are their partners and of losing it to them when they are their opponents. Let us now deal with them ' commercially '. That is the only aspect they will understand.

The domineering player obviously assumes that the partner whom he bullies is not so good at the game as himself. The partner may easily, in fact, be better ; but

let us for our present purpose agree that the bully is right in his assumption, and further, that he only bullies when his victim has made a bad mistake. We have, then, at the table a good player, and we have also a bad player. If there is any skill in the game at all, surely this arrangement is all in favour of the good player.

If there were no bad player at the table the good player would have no advantage. It does not seem to occur to the bully that it is two to one against cutting the poor player ; that normally, for every time he cuts with him, he cuts twice against him ; that every time the bad player makes a mistake when he is his partner he makes two when he is his opponent. The fact is that he wants to be on something to nothing. In domineering fashion he demands that the bad player shall make his mistakes only when he is playing against him. He will greedily take the money over two rubbers, but will grudge having to pay out over the third. He does not seem to realize that, if there were not a poor player at the table, he might never have won those two rubbers.

Given average luck all round, which must of course be assumed for my present purpose, you can place the players how you wish ; in the end the good player must win and the bad player must lose. If there are three good players and one bad player, the latter will provide the grist for the others. It is grossly vulgar for any one of them to complain of his mistakes when he cuts him. No player is attacked when he is an opponent. Mistakes he then makes are probably not noticed at all. The bully invariably attributes any success to good play on his own part.

If there are two good players and two bad ones, then the odds on the good players will be just the same. It will be even money when they cut against each other, and they will ' cut-up ' the other two when they cut together.

I remember on one occasion two very poor players cutting against two experts. ' Come on, partner,' said the less discerning ' mutt ', ' let's win a good rubber.' His partner

had a sense of proportion and a sense of humour. 'Sheep might kill butchers,' he said; 'but they're not apt to!'

If there is one good player and three bad players, for every mistake the good player's partner makes his opponents will make two.

It is surprising that people whose sole object appears to be to make money at the game will often be the worst offenders in grumbling at the play of their partners. From their point of view the worse the play the better it should be for them. When your partner has unjustifiably gone down 400 at Auction, you should not abuse him, but rejoice in the thought that you are in reality 400 up; because, as sure as night follows day, that same player will go down 400 twice when he is your opponent.

There is the case of a man who used regularly to lose about £5,000 per annum in a certain London club. He has given up playing because he could no longer stand the abuse of one or two members *when they were his partners*. He was very pleasant to play with. He never attempted abusive criticism of those who were worse than he. The members who eventually chased him out of the card-room had consistently profited in considerable amounts from his mistakes. But they wanted more! In language varying in degree of ferocity they told him, in effect, that he must only make his mistakes on the two occasions out of three when he was an opponent.

There is also the case, recently reported in the Press, of Mrs. Mary Lee Bishop, a Detroit negress. This should serve as a warning to a certain type of Bridge player. She was sentenced to imprisonment for life for bad manners at the card table. She shot dead her partner who had twice played a wrong card!

There is an even more recent case; again in America. A woman shot her husband dead as a result of an altercation at the card table. He had been her partner in life, but she could not stand him as a partner at Bridge.

If you *must* be offensive, your best course is to combine

your comment with wit. An expert player, after suffering in silence tortures from his partner, was humbly asked at the end of a hand: 'I could not have made more, could I?' 'No,' was the reply; '*you* couldn't.'

This sort of thing is amusing, and I would not quarrel seriously with commercially-minded players who went no further. Implied in it is the statement: 'Well, *you* couldn't do better, and there is nothing more to be said. You won't do better when you are my opponent, and I am therefore bound to gain on balance; why then should I grumble and thereby spoil any pleasure you get out of the game? After all, you pay for it, and in the long run I must get part of the proceeds.'

I have dealt with this aspect of bridge 'commercially' on purpose. Taking a higher line of thought, it would be possible to condemn the bad-tempered players even more severely.

I have often listened to discussion as to whether the bad winner (the gloater) is a greater offender than the bad loser. There is not much to choose between them. No one minds a mild display of elation on the part of a winner nor a reasonable amount of 'grousing' by a player who is very out of luck, provided it is not directed at his partner.

The ideal player is he who, however fortune treats him, is a good loser and a good winner. If this applies to those with whom you play, you are indeed lucky in associating with gentlefolk, no matter how they were born. I am reminded of an incident in a well-known club. A member on being asked whether a certain individual was a gentleman replied: 'I don't know; I've never seen him at the card table.'

As in the game of life, so in a game of cards—we must play what is dealt to us; the glory consists not so much in winning as in playing a poor hand well.

CHAPTER IX

STRANGE OCCURRENCES

IN all forms of activity one comes across unusual and peculiar incidents, but in none more than at the card table.

In my own experience I can recollect several strange occurrences. Some years ago I was playing in a rubber which proceeded in the ordinary way, and finally, after about six hands, my partner and I won it. It was then found that from first to last no one had scored. The points were high and it was before dinner! It was easy to remember that we had won two games and that our opponents had won one, but no one could recollect the exact scores, particularly for honours and penalties.

The point arose as to what was to happen about the settling. I had never before heard of such a case, and strictly, I suppose, our opponents could have ignored the proceedings. However, we worked out that we must have been to the good, so it was decided—rather generously, I think—to pay us rubber points.

In every club there are a number of players who seldom, if ever, score, and when we sat down no one realized that all the players comprising this particular four were in the habit of allowing others to do the scoring. It might be thought that the Bridge was poor, but that in fact was not the case. Those who do not score regularly are often able to memorize the score below the line. It becomes practically mechanical, just as a man who has never owned a watch (I am myself a case in point) can usually tell the time with uncanny accuracy.

Another incident of a most unusual nature occurred in the same club shortly afterwards. On the second trick, the declarer played the Ace of clubs on his opponent's

King. Instead of putting the trick on the table in front of him, he absent-mindedly placed the four cards in his hand. Clubs were not led again until the sixth trick, whereupon the declarer played the Ace of clubs out of his hand on his opponent's Queen, thus making two tricks with the same Ace.

Astonishing as it may seem, no one noticed it, and at the end of the hand the declarer found he had four cards too many. After considerable discussion, the players decided to have a new deal. In this case it must be admitted the Bridge was poor.

While on the subject of new deals, I recall an amusing incident at Auction. It concerned a hot-tempered Irishman who was obviously playing for points he could not afford. He was in the habit of blanching and getting red in the face by turns if things were not going well. Only when he or his partner had all the good cards would he sit still in his seat and behave as though he were enjoying himself. One day, after losing several rubbers, he cut with one of the worst players in the room, a notorious over-caller.

The latter knew all his ways, and had for some time been awaiting an opportunity to pay off old scores. He dealt and bid ' Three no trumps '. ' Double ', said the man on his left smartly. The ' No ' of the hot-tempered Irishman could be heard all over the room. ' Four spades,' said his partner, grinning. ' Double,' said his opponent. Our friend was now nearly in convulsions. ' No,' he said, after shifting about in his chair and going white in the face. ' Six clubs,' said his partner. This was too much to bear. The Irishman, looking as if he were going to have an apoplectic fit, jumped up from his seat and, waving his arms in the air, said he could not stand it any longer, and would not go on with the rubber. In his excitement he upset a side table, scattering glasses and ash-trays on the floor.

A number of bystanders came up to find out what all the

fuss was about. One of them made some naïve remark, and there was imminent danger of a free fight. Then the man who had been the cause of all the trouble came to the conclusion that he had gone far enough. 'Don't worry,' he said. 'I've got fourteen cards!'

One of the most extraordinary calls I ever heard at Auction was made by a noble lord. He dealt and bid pre-emptively 'Four hearts'. He was doubled and went down 700!

I was playing against him, and it struck me that to shut every one else out by saying he was going to make ten tricks when in fact he could only make three was exceptional. It is to be hoped that the peer in question has a better gift for legislation than he has for Bridge.

But, searching my memory, I think even this incident can be capped. My partner dealt and bid 'One no trumps'. One of the opponents bid 'Three spades', which my partner doubled. They made a grand slam against him! The points were £5 per 100 in a club of the highest standing. Every one was perfectly sober. Moreover, my partner was a man who has a fine knowledge of the game. I think I am entitled to claim this as an absolute record.

HEARTBREAK HANDS

One of my most disappointing experiences at Auction was when as dealer I held eleven spades to the quint major. I bid 'Five spades' and played the hand with spades as trumps. I made no mistake, but failed to go game.

There is, of course, a catch in this. Actually, my left hand adversary bid 'Seven diamonds', I bid 'Six spades', was doubled, and lost on balance ten points. I have often thought of this hand, because I was having a very bad run of luck at the time, and I remember preening myself on at last having a hand on which game seemed certain. As it turned out, I could only save game, for the opponents would have made 'Seven diamonds'.

This goes to show that at Bridge, as at every other form of activity, ' you never can tell '.

Indeed, this experience of mine was nothing when compared to that of the player who is alleged to have held twelve spades to the quint major and the Ace of diamonds.

He was forced up to ' Seven spades ' and failed to get it. A diamond was led, and it was ruffed !

Let me tell of another *Dieu depose* incident. I was sitting behind a player who had suffered severe criticism from his partner. At last he hit back. Picking up his hand, he said : ' Very well ; if that's the way you're going to talk, I'll let you down on purpose.' The dealer on his right bid ' Three hearts '. ' Double,' he said. He had not the sign of a trick in his hand. His partner, however, had a good hand and they made 300 !

THE DECLARER'S DILEMMA

Recently I was a spectator of an amusing incident. The declarer had three winning clubs in dummy. He led out two of them, but failed to lead the third. It was obvious he could never get back, and clearly he had thrown the game away. His partner, who was an excitable foreigner, went for him ' tooth and nail '. During an avalanche of criticism and abuse the declarer never uttered a word.

Then, when the cards had been cut for the next deal, he explained his action. He had discarded from his own hand on the first two winning clubs led from dummy, and then found that he had a club in his hand. He decided not to risk the revoke being seen as it might have been, and he led dummy's remaining club and played his own club on it.

I wonder what is the most freak call ever made at Auction ? The one that I remember best was when the dealer held eight diamonds to the quart major, the Ace of clubs bare, two small spades and two small hearts. He bid

' Two clubs ', was left in, and only made one trick. There were four honours in clubs in one hand against him, and as his opponents scored 50 for little slam and 350 for under tricks, he lost 448 points. His attempt to induce a bid of ' Two no trumps ' against him had signally failed.

Some of the finest Auction players sometimes make freak calls. I mean such a bid as ' One club ' when there is no club in the hand. There is method in this, provided it is not overdone. Normally, a first-class player's bids are so good that their very soundness may on occasion detract from their merit. If you know that every time you speak your opponents will put you with exactly what you have, the element of bluff is eliminated. In all text-books you will find that you are told not to do this or that because you may deceive your partner. Too little stress is laid on the question of deceiving your opponents. In first-class Bridge it is desirable to appear erratic at times. One famous player used to go so far as to make a mistake now and again on purpose. His play was so good that it became monotonous, and he decided to vary it sometimes so that his opponents could never be sure whether he was ' all out ' or playing the fool. This player used sometimes to make very light ' Two no trumps ' bids. When asked why he had done so he would say that his hand was too weak for ' One no trumps ' !

The most famous case of freak calling is quite recent. A player bid ' Four spades ' originally at Contract without a spade in his hand ! He felt certain that he would be doubled and then he proposed to switch to ' Five diamonds '. His plan was that if the ' Five diamonds ' bid was doubled (as, being a switch, was likely) he would re-double.

Alas ! it all went wrong, because his ' Four spades ' bid was left in undoubled. This happened at £5 per 100, equivalent to Auction at nearly £15 per 100. The fact that the points were high was advantageous for such a manœuvre. The adversaries were also playing for high points, and therefore they were not likely to let a ' Four

spades ' bid go by undoubled if they could see their way to defeat it. They could not tell that it was a freak call. When the bidding at Contract follows normal lines there is seldom a satisfactory switch from a big game going bid. The doubler is therefore usually safe from ' switches '.

One hears of big scores from freak hands, but seldom of tricks being made by a player with an apparently trickless hand. Here is a case which recently occurred. Z made five by cards with hearts as trumps. The only two tricks he lost were made by B. This was B's hand: Spades—8, 7, 5, 4; Hearts—8, 6, 3; Diamonds—5, 3; Clubs—9, 6, 3, 2. B made his 8 of hearts by ruffing the third round of diamonds, and he made the 9 of clubs on the last trick. It is quite a nice problem to work out how this could have occurred, Z having made no mistake in the play of the hand.

I wonder has any one else had my experience of winning three rubbers running without making a bid or playing a card? When this happened I pointed out how astonishing it was, and my partner was ungallant enough to suggest that I was unlikely to win three rubbers running under any other circumstances!

Another peculiar experience was when I lost eight rubbers running at Auction, won the ninth, and thereupon got up a winner. I lost on points on each of the eight rubbers—their average working out at 250 points. In eight rubbers I therefore lost 2,000 points. In the ninth I won 2,460 points. Truly, Bridge is an amazing game.

The most astonishing thing I ever saw at the card table was a free fight between two quite elderly gentlemen. It occurred in a South Coast resort some years ago. We were proceeding with an enjoyable rubber when my two opponents suddenly got up and proceeded to aim severe blows at each other. It was with difficulty they were separated, but eventually I conducted one of them out of the room, while other members endeavoured to restrain his adversary.

It was sad to reflect that they had cut as partners and should therefore, by all the tenets of the game, have endeavoured to help each other ; moreover, my regret at the incident was genuine, for my partner and I were well ahead above the line, and the rubber was never finished. I have since heard that one of the antagonists died shortly afterwards ; whether his demise was accelerated by his partner's blows, or by the shock of his partner's play, I have been unable to ascertain. A charge of manslaughter might reasonably have been preferred either way.

This reminds me of a minor ' row ' which occurred some time ago. An expert player cut with another fine player against two mediocre performers. One of the latter jokingly said : ' Well, it's Gentlemen *v.* Players.' He was asked to come out into the street, but eventually it was smoothed over without serious consequences.

' Players ' presumably meant professionals, and, unlike cricket or any other form of activity, there is at Bridge a stigma attaching to the latter word. I have discussed this in a previous chapter ; I merely now note the absurdity of attempting to distinguish in such fashion between those taking part in any game. All are players, but some are not gentlemen.

On one occasion I nearly got into trouble when having cut with a certain player, notorious for his lack of ability and for other things, I ventured to say : ' I always cut him both in the street and at the card table.' It passed off all right.

Some years ago an incident at a well-known club caused great amusement. The normal stake at this club is the modest one of *2s. 6d.* per 100 and payment is made after each rubber. For many months past a certain member seemed always to be short of ready money when he lost. He would turn to one of his adversaries and say : ' I'll pay you to-morrow.' In course of time 50 per cent of the card-playing members were owed various small sums. Then, one day, the member in question was playing with three others who were not conversant with his habits.

He arranged to play for 5*s*. per 100, his opponents agreeing to put the whole thing (7*s*. 6*d*. per 100) ' in the bag '. He lost a rubber of 600 points and turning to his partner said : ' Well, you'd better pay me and I'll square both sides.' His partner paid him out 15*s*. and he then went off to have a drink, saying to his two adversaries : ' I'll give it you to-morrow.'

I wonder do players know of the most famous case of swindling within the law ? It occurred in America, where a revoking player is permitted to go game. The dealer bid ' Two no trumps '. He had a fine hand with the King of diamonds bare. The Ace of diamonds was led, and when dummy put his hand down the declarer saw that he had every trick except in the diamond suit. He accordingly discarded on the Ace of diamonds and made the King on the second round and the rest of the tricks. They didn't play with him any more.

Every Bridge player knows the story of the man who was asked to a party and was told that the points were 1*s*. He won every rubber and was offered £96. He could not possibly have paid had he lost ; he thought they meant 1*s*. per 100, not 1*s*. points, which of course are £5 per 100. I do not know if the story is true, but I have personal knowledge of an occurrence of a similar kind.

Two years ago I was playing at White's, where I was an honorary member from the St. James', when a certain French nobleman rushed into the room in an excited state and said he wanted urgently to speak to me. When my rubber was ' up ' he told me that finding himself, on arrival in London, an honorary member of the Portland Club he had that afternoon hailed a taxi and asked to be driven there. He entered the card-room and was told that the points were 5*s*. He had assumed that the points at the Portland were highish, but he had no idea they played for £25 per 100. However, he was a very rich man and fond of a gamble, so he cut in. He won a rubber of 500 points, and to his astonishment was handed 25*s*. He

at once sensed that there must be something wrong, for while a stake of £25 per 100 had surprised him, he felt certain that they did not play as low as 5s. per 100 at the Portland. He made some excuse and went straight to the hall porter. 'Is this the Portland Club?' he asked. 'No,' was the reply. 'This is the Wyndham.' He covered up his confusion, jumped into a taxi, and came straight away round to me to ask what he should do about it.

He had played cards in a club which he had no right to enter and he was very upset. It is strange that the taxi-driver should have gone wrong. The two clubs are situated in the same square, four doors apart.

Such mistakes are quite possible in the summer when many clubs are closed for renovation. If you belong to three or four well-known clubs it is not uncommon in August or September to find yourself an honorary member of eight or nine other clubs. If a club is giving hospitality to more than one club, it is not easy for the porters to know who you are when you walk in. The porter of the club itself assumes you belong to one of the visiting clubs, and the porter of each visiting club assumes you are a member of the club or of one of the other visiting ones.

I once made a bet that I would play one or more rubbers of Bridge in eight different clubs on the same afternoon between the hours of 3 and 8 p.m. I won the bet. The proceeds just covered the cost of the taxi I kept waiting.

CHEATING

Our generation may justly be proud of the fact that cheating at cards is far less prevalent than formerly. At least, that is my view. There are, of course, cheats about, but it is becoming increasingly difficult for them to get away with it.

Some years ago a very well-known man was notorious for his activities in stacking the cards, manipulating the cut, and looking over his adversaries' hands. Every one

knew what he was up to, but no one dared to accuse him of cheating to his face. It is a very difficult thing to prove. It was not a question of money; he was very well-off. He suffered from a sort of kleptomania. A well-known card player used often to take him on at picquet. One day this player was approached by a friend. 'Why do you play with him?' he asked. 'Don't you know he cheats?' 'Yes, of course,' he replied; 'but he is so busy with his cheating that he misses all the finer points of the game, so I win anyhow.'

Another well-known man, a multi-millionaire, used invariably to look over your hand when you were his opponent. I often held mine out so as to make it easy for him. Many of us recognized that he was so bad a player that it was only fair to give him some advantage!

Sometimes, however, we decided to defeat him. We started a new game, with very simple rules. You held your hand up close to your chest until dummy 'went down'. Then, if you had (say) a Queen which was obviously an important card, you placed it behind another card in your hand so that it could not possibly be seen.

This done, you relaxed in the matter of holding up your hand and permitted the peeper to have a good look. Finding the important card in question apparently missing, he would invariably finesse the wrong way. The look of pained surprise on his face when it went wrong was a delight to behold.

The recently introduced 'Smith' convention provides an up-to-date method of cheating. If you have a bad hand, you make a pretence of counting your cards. You then place them face downwards on the table and say, 'Partner, I've only twelve cards.'

The partner's response is simple.

If he also has a bad hand, he says, 'I've got fourteen; new deal.'

If his hand is good, he says, 'I've got thirteen; count yours again, partner!'

CHAPTER X

SLOW THINKERS AND 'SPEED MERCHANTS'

WHICH is the most irritating habit at the card table? Many would say slow play; but I am inclined to think that very quick play is even worse. I have nothing to say in favour of the slow player. Some hesitate and keep the table waiting when there is, in fact, nothing whatever to think about.

Others are naturally slow thinkers, and one cannot therefore blame them; but there are players who seem incapable of playing a card without delay, even though they have only one of the suit led. It is simply a habit, and a very bad one. One is apt to lose all interest in the game, and even to forget what has already passed.

Players who are habitually slow show lack of consideration. One mannerism is to finger several cards before playing one. Then there is the man who, when it is his turn to produce a card, will stare at the ceiling and generally behave as if he were not of this earth. Unfortunately, however, he is, and one can but wait.

My advice to these players is to make their mistakes quickly. There is the story of the American who on arrival in his suite at a London hotel picked up the telephone. Getting no immediate reply from the operator he began to rage against our dilatory methods. His wife, trying to pacify him said: 'Now, Henry, you know perfectly well that over there we are always getting wrong numbers.' 'That's so,' he said, 'but we do get some action.'

At Bridge, long-drawn-out efforts of thought are seldom of avail. If the game is so extreme an effort it cannot be enjoyable. But ultra-quick play may be even more disconcerting. This fault is found more often among

woman than men. A common notion is that very quick play denotes expert knowledge and skill. Nothing could, in fact, be farther from the truth. There is much more in the game than many realize, and it is quite certain that no one, however expert, can make the most of his cards without due consideration.

I will go further and say that the very quick player must, *ipso facto*, be second rate. Players of this type are usually found only in poor company, but they succeed in creating the impression that they play well. One reason is that in such company their mistakes are not noticed owing to the rapidity with which they make them.

Another is that those who find they cannot play at the same rate mistakenly assume that any one who apparently can must be a very good player. In poor company, quick play not only gives an impression of skill but causes others at the table to play more quickly than is their custom. The quick player gains by this, for he (or more usually she) has acquired the habit, while her opponents become confused.

In good company, the weakness of the very quick player is at once exposed. Any good player can play at her pace better than she can ; moreover, no experienced player will be worried by the pace set and will continue at his normal rate, oblivious of what is being attempted in the way of speed. He will thus get all there is to be got out of his cards, while his rapid opponent will inevitably make mistakes.

I am never an advocate of slow play, but my advice to those opposed to a ' speed merchant ' is to go out of their way to play more slowly than is their custom. If you are not a first-class player this is the best way to deal with the situation. An attempt is being made to discomfit you. Counter it by discomfiting your opponent.

If you play very slowly against a very quick player you will get the upper hand, for slow play worries him or her probably even more than quick play worries you.

The worst offence of all is comparatively slow play when a difficult situation arises, and very quick play when all seems plain sailing. This is simply bad manners, for it is when one side has the good cards that difficulties for the other usually arise.

You may be able to save a slam by watching carefully the fall of the cards. It is often very difficult to know what to discard on a long suit played out by the declarer. It is very easy for the holder of the long suit.

When she slaps out one card after another with perfect nonchalance hardly waiting for each trick to be completed, it is often difficult to avoid the conclusion that the object is to confuse you and cause you to go wrong in your discards.

Another annoying habit is the play from dummy of a card of the suit led before half dummy's cards are exposed. No one can play well without making up a plan of campaign after seeing dummy's cards. The man who plays from his own hand and from dummy before the latter's cards are fully exposed stamps himself as a poor player.

Moreover, such action causes delay, because no one can glance at dummy's hand, take in the situation, and watch two cards being played at the same time. It invariably results in questions being asked. Who played the Ace? Where did the two come from? Has my partner played yet? Is that your card? It is usually a case of more haste, less speed.

Then, again, very quick play is often unfair, for every one must hesitate sometimes, and when the rapid player does so, information is inevitably conveyed.

In Bridge, as in all things, the ideal is the happy mean. Play at a steady pace. Never hesitate long if you can possibly help it; and, above all, do not show complete lack of consideration by throwing the cards about all over the place when you happen to find it easy for yourself.

CHAPTER XI

ON BRIDGE LITERATURE

CARD literature was never more profuse than it is to-day. Nearly every important newspaper prints weekly Bridge articles and there are a large and ever-increasing number of books dealing technically with the game. Then we have the *Auction Bridge Magazine*, an excellent little monthly publication, edited by Mr. A. E. Manning Foster. Mr. Foster is the author of *Auction Bridge for All*. In my view, this book at present holds the field as the standard work on Auction Bridge.

In the United States they have *The Bridge World*, a first-rate monthly magazine.

Reading will give you all the principles of the game. Once you have fully grasped these you have only one more step to take to become an expert. You must apply your knowledge at the card table. No writer can help you to do this. No one ever became a first-class player by reading books, nor even by writing them ; but unless you are born with card sense of a very high order you cannot hope to achieve success without the necessary technical instruction which only a good book can give you.

MIXED ADVICE OF THE EXPERTS

Enthusiasts often complain of the disparity of opinion among writers. I once had two articles brought to my notice which showed that two well-known writers gave contrary advice on a matter of vital importance. One of them advocated an original bid at Auction of ' One club ' on Ace, King, 10 of clubs, and nothing else of value in the hand. The other described such a bid as ' ridiculous ' and ' a craze among poor players only '.

They were not criticizing each other, but writing quite independently on the subject of original bids.

My informant said he would refrain from saying all that could be said. He would merely remark : '*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes.*'

He evidently regarded Bridge as a game of hard-and-fast principles, permitting no difference of opinion among alleged experts. He apparently also thought that every writer sets himself up as sole authority.

I think there is error in both assumptions. Auction Bridge is an elastic game, and it is inevitable that there should be differences of opinion even among acknowledged experts. Indeed, if it were not so the game would lose much of its fascination. Temperament enters very largely into it, and a course of action which may suit one type of player may be disastrous to another.

It is much the same with other games. Take cricket. Jack Hearne is admittedly a fine batsman, and so is Maurice Tate. But if you could induce Tate to attempt steady batting and Hearne to hit from the moment he arrives at the wicket, both would fail miserably. Articles on batting from the pen of those two cricketers would show great divergence of view. Equally violent would be the contrast if they wrote on how to bowl. We all have different methods at every game.

Standardization and set rules are impossible, and indeed not desirable.

As regards writers on Bridge, they are merely stating their own opinions and giving the methods they have found successful in the various circles in which they play. Members of the public who require advice must sift it all out for themselves and draw their own conclusions.

It is more or less generally assumed that a writer must *ipso facto*, be an expert player. There is no easier way of acquiring a reputation for good play than to write a few articles on the game ; but some find it far easier to write well than to play well. For writing, knowledge of general

principles, a capacity for leisurely thought, and a fluent pen will suffice. But the two last-mentioned attributes will avail you nothing at the card table.

There are some good writers who are good players, there are other good writers who are poor players, and I suppose there are good players who are bad writers ; there may even be bad writers who are bad players. In making this statement I give would-be critics of this book every chance ! No writer, so far as I know, holds himself up to the public as omniscient ; very few attempt to be dogmatic. Sometimes a statement or assertion will be followed merely because the particular writer has a ' name '. There is also the inevitable glamour of the printed word. People will ignore verbal tips, but if they get a wire, ' Two no trumps ; fear nothing,' only the very strong-willed can refrain from a bet.

There is a very large Bridge-reading public. My advice to members of it is to refrain from accepting counsel on the ground that it was given by So-and-so. For all they know the writer in question may be a poor player, and his advice may be equally poor. The only real test is a *reasoned* statement. If no reason is given—simply a statement of the writer's opinion—ignore it. If it is a reasoned statement, and the reasoning appears good, then you are receiving advice which may be really helpful.

Thousands of players make a practice of writing to the Press asking what should be bid on a particular hand, or some such question. They duly receive a reply. Often no reason is given : it is merely the opinion of the writer, and may be good or bad.

Even if it is good it is of very little use because every hand differs and the advice cannot be applied to other hands. If, however, full reasoning is given, that can be assimilated and applied to all similar cases.

A fault to be found in nearly every book on Bridge is the frequency with which big hands are set out as examples of precept in bidding. Many players refuse to read the books on the ground that they never hold such good hands

as are given and therefore they do not wish to waste time studying what they should call on them.

MECHANICAL METHODS

Mr. Wilbur C. Whitehead, the noted American writer, has recently published a book entitled *Contract Bridge Standards*. It is the most complicated treatise imaginable. To say that it is highly technical is putting it mildly. His point of view is that bidding can be reduced to a scientific system of mathematical valuation. Card sense, psychology, flair, initiative—all these take a back seat. Mr. Whitehead does not say so, but that is the inevitable conclusion. All that makes Bridge worth while is sacrificed to this modern insensate desire to standardize bids and to make them rule of thumb and mechanical.

Skill in bidding, as we understand it, is eliminated. It is no longer necessary to be a card player; all you need is a knowledge of mathematics and a knowledge of the system. You must know whether your hand counts $3\frac{1}{2}$ tricks or $4\frac{3}{4}$ tricks, and your bid will be right provided you remember what was said in the book about these particular figures.

But you must commit to memory a great deal more than this. There is 'quick trick' valuation and 'initial probable trick' valuation. There are 'plus values' and there are 'promotional' and 'distributional' trick values.

Before bidding originally you must obviously take into consideration the possibility that the adversaries may obtain the final declaration, and you must 'count' your hand accordingly. In such a case, King, Queen, 10 of a suit is said to be $1\frac{1}{4}$ tricks; King, Knave, 10 is $\frac{3}{4}$ of a trick; and Queen, 10, x is $\frac{1}{4}$ of a trick. 'Initial probable trick valuation' is inclusive of both high card and long card values. Thus if you hold King, Queen, 10, x, x, of spades you have $1\frac{1}{4}$ 'quick' tricks, and, assuming the hand is to be played in spades, two 'probable' tricks, the

last two cards of the suit being held to be ' probable ' tricks.

' High intermediates ', such as Knaves and tens, singleton outside Kings, etc., are described as ' plus values '. These are said to be worth about $\frac{1}{5}$th of a trick. Three such ' plus values ' are held to be worth $\frac{1}{2}$ a ' probable trick '.

In the example I have given the ' high intermediate ', the 10 does not add $\frac{1}{5}$th of a trick to the hand because its value is already included in the ' quick trick ' valuation which is $1\frac{1}{4}$. Thus in this case we are saved from adding $\frac{1}{5}$th to $1\frac{1}{4}$.

But suppose you hold spades—Ace, King, 10, x, x. You have two ' quick tricks ' (the Ace, King), two ' probable tricks ' (the last two trumps), and in addition $\frac{1}{5}$th of a trick (the 10). If you hold a singleton outside King (say in hearts) you have $\frac{1}{5}$th of a trick more, and if by any chance you have Queen, x, of clubs as well, this is a further ' high intermediate ', counting $\frac{1}{5}$th of a trick. These two outside ' counts ', combined with the $\frac{1}{5}$th of a trick you hold in the trump suit, make $\frac{1}{2}$ a ' probable trick '.

Your hand in this case is therefore said to hold 2 ' quick tricks ' and $2\frac{1}{2}$ ' probable tricks '. If, however, the single King of hearts is not in the hand, the ' count ' would be $2\frac{2}{5}$ ' quick tricks ' and 2 ' probable tricks '.

It will be seen that if all four players have hands similar to this one the total number of ' quick tricks ' is $9\frac{3}{5}$, and the total number of probable tricks is 8. The scramble to obtain the declaration, thereby converting ' probable ' tricks ' into ' certain tricks ', then begins.

When we get to the ' probable trick supporting ' value of a hand, the matter becomes even more complicated. It is said to be approximately double the ' quick trick ' value of its high cards. I need not attempt a description of ' promotional ' and ' distributional ' trick values. It is admitted that often they are unbiddable. To my mind, the whole thing is unthinkable.

Let it be clearly understood that I am condemning the

system rather than the book. If there are any players in this country who think this sort of thing might help them to improve their game, this is the best book they can read. If we take Mr. Whitehead as an advocate of the mechanical system (and he obviously is), then every one who reads him will marvel at his masterly exposition of its alleged advantages.

I, personally, am filled with admiration at his skill and dexterity in dealing with the subject which he has set himself to expound. A highly technical treatise on chess would be child's play in comparison with this. There is probably more real hard work and concentrated effort in this book than in any publication dealing with any game.

Mr. Whitehead's intention is to explain his system, and he does that in a way which proves his ability up to the hilt.

My view is that the system is abhorrent in principle and useless in practice, for in every example given the same result (the correct one) would have been arrived at by any one who employs ordinary ' card sense ' methods.

I go further. In any book it is necessary to produce hands which will fit in exactly with the precept expounded. In common with other writers, Mr. Whitehead does this ; and he is quite right. My point is that his system would break down lamentably if he did not ; whereas, if the ordinary hand is dealt with in the ordinary way by the ordinary card player breakdowns would be less frequent.

Those who follow Mr. Whitehead's system can be likened to a boy who ' crams ' for an examination. By an effort of memory the boy will get concentrated knowledge into his head. If he can retain it for a few weeks until the day of the examination he will get through. Within a few months he will be out in the world, and when similar problems arise it will be found that he knows nothing whatever of the particular subject in which he passed with flying colours !

I adjure players in this country to have nothing whatever to do with these artificial devices for valuing hands.

The very efficiency with which they are expounded is a great danger. They may help you to play cards, but they will never enable you to become a card player.

RULE OF THUMB

Every new book published brings evidence of the modern tendency, particularly in America, to devise mechanical, rule-of-thumb methods of bidding, both at Auction and at Contract. Let me give another example of the sort of thing that is ' put across ' a beginner.

In his book *Contract Bridge* (1928) Mr. Milton Work says that an Ace is one trick, a King guarded is $\frac{1}{2}$ a trick, a Queen guarded is $\frac{1}{4}$ of a trick, and so on. I am not sure whether under his system a Knave is $\frac{1}{8}$ of a trick or not, and I have no idea what fraction a 10 represents.

Mr. Work proceeds to advise contract players to make an original bid of ' One no trumps ' if they have three suits stopped and a Queen above an average hand. At Auction a similar bid is justified with a Knave about the average. This fine distinction is already enough to make any one with card sense gasp for breath; but consider what follows. For the purpose of arriving at a decision as to what is an average hand an Ace is reckoned as 4, a King as 3, a Queen as 2, and a Knave as 1. Thus an average hand counts 10. An additional Queen brings the total up to 12. Accordingly, advice is given that ' One no trumps ' should be bid at Contract on a hand which counts 12.

A note is added to the effect that if two 10's are held, the fact might justify *an able player* in bidding on a count of 11 ! Can one possibly imagine an able player practising such methods !

As I have said, this method of teaching is farcical. It is basically wrong. To follow it is the one sure way of failing to acquire card sense. Any Bridge player knows that a 2 is often a most valuable card. It may be the last card of a long suit when the hand is being played without

trumps and therefore a certain trick. Or it may be a trump which can be used to take an Ace played by an opponent. In such a case the system of valuing an Ace as a trick and a 2 as nil is fallacious. Any such system always would be at such a game as Bridge. It is card sense, and that alone, which will get you out of the rut of the moderate players' class. If you want to acquire it, have nothing whatever to do with artificial devices for bidding, and similarly set your face rigidly against any form of set convention.

All these systems are derived from the 'Robertsonian rule', which had a fleeting success among Bridge simpletons when it was first introduced in the early days of the game. Even in poor company one has not heard of it for many years. Why should we now be saddled with these offshoots from it? They are even worse because they are more cumbrous and more mechanical. I maintain that any such system is thoroughly bad in principle and that it has the effect of sapping out of the unfortunate beginner any natural card sense he may have.

But even if it is held to have its uses, let us see how it works in practice. Let us consider to what extent any one who takes the trouble to learn it will succeed in bidding soundly. He becomes a mathematician rather than a card player, but let that pass. I take an example from Mr. Work's book:

Three Aces and no other cards of value count 12. According to the system therefore, whether vulnerable or not, 'One no trumps' should be bid at Contract. This is thoroughly unsound. It is a border-line bid at Auction; one that should be made only if owing to the absence of four cards headed by an Ace in a minor suit there is no alternative to a pass. But this hand counts one above the minimum for Auction, which is 11. Thus at Auction a hand containing two Kings, two Queens, and a Knave is a 'One no trumps' bid! And a hand containing three 'bare' Aces is presumably a good 'One no trumps' bid!

At Contract I would say that it is definitely a bad bid, even in the non-vulnerable position, unless psychological factors justify it.

Let me take an example of my own : Spades—x, x, x ; Hearts—Queen, Knave, x ; Diamonds—Ace 10, x ; Clubs—Ace, 10, x, x ; this hand counts 11, and therefore according to the system it is a ' One no trumps ' bid at Auction. For an *able* player it is even a ' One no trumps ' bid at Contract, for those two 10's are there ! Comment on this would be superfluous.

If we take the case of higher bidding the result may be even more farcical. Take the following hand at Contract : Spades—King, x ; Hearts—Ace, x ; Diamonds—Ace, x ; Clubs—Ace, King, Queen, x, x, x, x. If there are any beginners who have so little vision that at love score they would refrain from bidding ' Three no trumps ' on this hand, no precept of any sort will help them. And yet according to the system evolved by one of the leading writers in the United States, it is not a ' Three no trumps ' bid. He lays down that 21 is the *minimum* count. This hand counts only 20. It is true he says his system is not dependable in gauging a ' Three no trumps ' bid, but this statement only helps further to discredit it in this particular case, for it is meant to convey that many hands which do count 21 are not ' Three no trumpers '. It is clear from the context that in no circumstances is a bid of ' Three no trumps ' justified on a hand which does not count 21.

I wonder what a chessman would say if he were told that a Queen counts 20, a Knight 5, and a Pawn 1 !

It is indeed strange that these two well-known authors, Mr. Whitehead and Mr. Work, who have done so much to popularize Bridge among the masses, should now come forward as advocates of these mechanical and inefficacious practices.

CHAPTER XII

INTERNATIONAL CONTESTS

AN interesting proposal has been recently put forward. It is that Bridge test matches should be arranged between this country and America.

We have always been famed for card sense, and though other countries have forged ahead of us at some pastimes, I doubt if we have yet surrendered the palm of Bridge to any one. It is of course difficult to say. There are no international competitions. There are no championships.

There should be. I have never been able to understand why there are not. There seems to be some deep-rooted prejudice against the idea. Test matches, without doubt, have indirectly resulted in an all-round improvement of the general standard of play at cricket. Similarly golf, tennis, and chess have benefited by the introduction of championship games.

It would be the same with Bridge.

At this moment it is easily the most popular game in the world. Games like cricket and football are largely played by men only, and, like most outdoor games, they are purely national and confined to the seasons. Bridge is played by men, women, and children at all times, and in nearly every part of the civilised world. It is truly an international game of universal popularity. When we consider the tension created by cricket test matches and international golf, tennis, and football, it is indeed surprising that no effort has yet been made to organize Bridge contests between nations. It must be remembered too that the interest of the masses in international games must necessarily be confined to reading Press accounts of what takes place, whereas by the aid of broadcasting every move at Bridge can be followed by the million.

Only about 40,000 people of leisure can get into the Oval to watch a Test Match, but Bridge tests can be ' watched ' by every one in the comfort of their own homes, and at an hour which does not interfere with the day's work.

Players are keen enough and they would take a lively interest in the performance of the experts. Owing, however, to the absence of any organization for the promotion of international contests they have to confine themselves to discussions, often parocial, of their own circle.

Bridge is one of the greatest games ever invented, and the time is ripe for it to receive the general publicity and impetus which its merit warrants. In the United States periodical contests are held between States and between rival towns. These are broadcast. They add greatly to the general interest taken in the game, and indirectly they serve a useful purpose in raising the standard of play.

Emulation is a great incentive. What we want in this country is to bring the finer points of the game more prominently before the public and to make them conscious and jealous of the exploits of the experts. One of these days I will see what can be done in this direction.

The idea originated in the U.S.A., where certain players resented recent British criticisms of American methods. Owing, however, to the absence in this country of any organization similar to the American Auction Bridge League, the question has not received due consideration. Comments in the English *Auction Bridge Magazine* led to a spirited reply from the *Auction Bridge Magazine* of America (now defunct). The Editor said :

> ' Every man to his fancy. If our English friends do not care for duplicate Bridge or for the infinite line of interesting things that occur when Greek meets Greek with the pasteboards, all knowing that foemen of equal skill are playing the same hands, that is their misfortune. If they don't like that sort of thing, then that is the

sort of thing they don't like; but, speaking for the American Bridge-playing public, we can conceive of no single sporting event that would be of more interest. It might settle the relative merits of the English system of play and ours.'

I entirely agree. I am firmly convinced that in spite of silly prejudice against it I could get together a four which would beat any four from America.

We in this country have nothing to be ashamed of as regards skill at the game, but we are very backward in all other respects.

It is stated that four members of the American Auction Bridge League have issued a challenge to us. They are prepared to come over here and play a series of matches with four of our representative players. They say they will play for love or ' with the sky as a limit '. I welcome this proposal. It would create the greatest possible interest. But we must leave the sky out of it. When they come over here our friends from across the sea will have to come down to earth. I suggest a round figure of £10 per 100. These points are not unknown at club Bridge in London, and are much higher than normal club points in the United States. If, therefore, we fix on this figure, the American team will have something to think about, apart from the sky! There will be no love in it, any more than there is between Lancashire and Yorkshire at cricket, though I hope the play will not be so slow. There are two difficulties that present themselves, but one of these can be partially solved. I mean the question of luck. At Bridge, the element of chance is so great that no ordinary contest, however prolonged, would necessarily provide a test of skill.

If A plays against B for an indefinite period and A wins, you cannot assume as a matter of certainty that A is a better player than B. I have already referred to the fact that there are six hundred and thirty-five thousand million

different hands which a Bridge player can hold. Thus a few games played on normal lines could not be a sure test of ability. There is, however, a way out of this difficulty. It is known as ' Duplicate Bridge '. There are two tables. At one the cards are dealt in the ordinary way, and at the other table the same cards are sorted out by an official. The cards held by the two English partners at one table will be played by the two American partners at the other, and vice versa. If the weight of cards is such that (say) A B at one table and Z Y at the other win any particular rubber, that will not be the deciding factor. The winners, apart from the stakes, will be held to be the players who having lost, lost the least, and who having won, won the most.

Thus the element of chance is to some extent eliminated, and the result may provide a test of skill. After each hand has been played at one table it will be very exciting to await the play of the same hand at the other. You may easily get positions where (say) the English side will make game at one table and save game against the Americans at the other.

There are other ways of arranging contests so as to eliminate luck as far as possible ; but of course there is no system which can do this absolutely.

Cases where bad play wins a game which no first-class player would have won must arise. The good player who takes a ten to one on chance will sometimes fail, while the bad player who (without knowing it) takes a ten to one against chance will sometimes succeed.

Hugh Elliot goes so far as to say that in nearly 25 per cent of hands bad players will score more than good players with the same cards.

A real difficulty would be the choice of teams, particularly over here. In America many of the leading players are engaged in professional activity at the game. This takes the form of writing, teaching, broadcasting, lecturing, and so on. Those who are thus in the public

eye seem generally to be regarded as among the best players. In America there is a huge public demand for instruction, and quite naturally those well versed in the game, or, at any rate, in facility for explaining it, supply that demand.

Mr. Wilbur C. Whitehead describes himself, or permits himself to be described, as ' The World's Greatest Authority '. Mr. Milton Work is also described as ' The World's Greatest Authority '.

Then Mr. Sydney S. Lenz is advertised as ' The World's Champion Bridge Player ' and ' The International Champion '. It is all very confusing. None of these gentlemen has ever played with first-class players in this country. But these descriptions are apparently accepted by Americans as a whole ; and therefore if the three players I have named were to come over here with A. N. Other of like fame, the American team might be held to be representative.

In England there is very little professional activity among expert players. There are one or two good players who write on the game, but no first-class player, so far as I know, who teaches or gives lectures. If there are any, they are not generally known and they would not be accepted as representative. With one or two exceptions, the best players in this country shrink from the public eye, and it would be very difficult to induce them to depart from that attitude. For some reason or other they regard Bridge as different in this respect from all other games. Any one of them would be proud to win the golf championship, or the tennis championship at Wimbledon, or the chess championship of the world, but they prefer to hide their skill at Bridge from the public gaze.

Nevertheless, I feel sure that a good four could be got together to take on the Americans, and that, while not necessarily the best available, they would beat them ' sky high '.

My friend Lord Castlerosse has recently come forward

as a supporter of the scheme. He has even picked a team.

In his highly entertaining 'Londoner's Log' in the *Sunday Express*, he has named eight players whom he considers should represent this country. We are getting on! All my life I have been keen on cricket, and I have often amused myself picking teams for the Tests. I fear, however, I am not much good at cricket. My views have never yet coincided with those in authority. And yet at cricket we have form to go upon. Everything that happens is observed by the public. Enthusiasts are constant watchers. Matches are fully and ably described in the Press. There are the averages given weekly. Above all, the element of luck is negligible.

This brings me to the question whether or not Lord Castlerosse is contemplating Duplicate Bridge. If he is not, then his team is very nearly the best available. With one possible exception, he has chosen eight of the luckiest players in London.

I have dealt fully with this question of luck in a previous chapter. I have alleged that in every club there are two or three players who are consistently lucky year after year. Mathematically, it would be surprising if it were not so. If there were no lucky or unlucky people in the world some of us would find ourselves in strangely different positions. I see no purpose in setting out here the names given in the *Sunday Express*. For the most part they are men unknown to the general public.

One or two observations with regard to them may, however, be of interest. There is the question of clubs. Some are members of several clubs, but there is always one club in particular which a player frequents. For our purpose, therefore, this can be said to be his club. In this sense Lord Castlerosse proposes four players who for years past have been regular performers at White's—one member of St. James', two members of the Portland, and one member of the Devonshire. With the possible exception of one

of the members of White's, who, so far as my observation has gone, is an average card-holder, all are well known in their respective clubs as very lucky players. They hold 'the stuff', and normally things go well for them, even when they are not quite up to the mark. Thus, I repeat, in a straight game, the team chosen could hardly be bettered. But if the game were Duplicate other considerations arise and there would be a great difference of opinion as to whether we had the right men.

All without exception are fine players, but are they the best available? I think not. At Duplicate Bridge the element of luck is reduced. Card-holding does not count at all, for, as I have already pointed out, each side has to play with the same distribution of cards. We must assume Duplicate Bridge, for otherwise no contest could be any test of skill. In that case only three of Lord Castlerosse's team would be certainties for the side I would select. He has made the mistake of assuming that those who play in his own circle are the best players. Some of us tell him we are good and he believes it.

He is, first of all 'a White's man' and not at all 'a Portland man', though he seems to have felt compelled to give two places to the Portland. In one case he has, I admit, gone quite outside his own environment: this, obviously, in order to rope in the luckiest player in London. Success is his god. He is impressed by the large sums which, given adequate luck, are made by goodish players in the company of very rich men some of whom have little or no idea of the game.

Let us consider the composition of his team. One is a young Guardsman—not a particularly lucky player, but certainly one of the best. One is a member of the London Stock Exchange and another 'on the Stock Exchange'. Two have no occupation, and, roughly speaking, have never had any. One is a writer, whose output recently has been confined to Bridge. Another is retired from active participation in affairs, and the eighth is a business man.

All play Contract regularly at points ranging from £2 to £5 per 100. All without exception are successful, partly because they are good and partly because they are lucky.

I think Lord Castlerosse has chosen a good team. Even at Duplicate Bridge I would lay heavy odds on them beating any team from America. But equally would I lay heavy odds on them being beaten by a team I could name.

It is all a question of opinion. If the matter is to be taken seriously, the first thing we must do is to inaugurate a series of duplicate games among ourselves. At Bridge, where luck plays such a large part, this is the only way of arriving at definite conclusions as regards skill. Lord Castlerosse and I may or may not know anything about Bridge. We are only giving our opinions, for what they may be worth, about others. The real test is performance. Let his team come out into the open against my team. Let us play with the same distribution of cards. When we have the result we can begin to talk, and to select the selectors. As I want three of his men and he has got there first, I think he ought to give me one of them and let us toss for the third. I note he leaves out the ladies. I warn him that one of my lot will play in skirts. At least, I hope she will.

CHAPTER XIII

AUTHORITY AND THE LAWS

AFTER the controversies of 1927, a period of calm prevades the English world of Auction Bridge. The revised Portland book of rules leaves us practically where we stood. Silly conventions and unpopular innovations are taboo, and we are left to enjoy the game as we did of old.

It is my firm conviction that the vast majority in Great Britain and in other parts of the Empire are satisfied with the game as it is now played. In their view the good old English way has turned out to be the best after all.

In complimenting the Portland Club Card Committee, and those who assisted them in revising the rules, I think I am voicing public opinion. We all owe a debt of gratitude to them for giving up part of their leisure time in our interests. The result of their labours has been generally approved.

The old book has been remodelled, and nearly every important rule has been redrafted. There is now little room for ambiguity, and the laws follow as far as possible the order of events at the table. There is also a copious index which facilitates quick settlement of disputes. When this new book is compared with the old, it must be admitted that we have previously gone on with very slipshod methods.

The members of a card committee are chosen mainly for their skill or experience at the game, and because their interest in it is such that they are prepared to devote some of their spare time to the welfare of the card-room. It does not follow that any of them are capable draughtsmen.

Successful drafting requires long practice and experience. There are, of course, business houses which employ expert

draughtsmen, such as, for example, finance houses which issue prospectuses ; but by far the best draughtsmen in the country are obviously to be found in Government departments. It is unfortunate that all these years the Card Committee of the Portland Club has never had the advantage of including among its members an experienced Government official. But in 1927 the Committee realized the advantage of good draughtsmanship, and they called to their aid men thoroughly versed in it. When we remember that the ' revision ' undertaken in 1924 was considered to be the last word in law-making at Bridge we have some justification for being amazed at the improvements now effected.

I welcome the latest book, particularly as it helps us to retain our supremacy in the Bridge world.

It may be of interest if I give the inner history of the movement for the adoption of ' majority calling '.

A violent campaign was suddenly launched in a certain section of the London Press. Its main features were abuse of the Portland Club and insistent demand for the adoption of the American code of laws.

The Portland Club hastily rushed to the country for a vote on the question of ' majority calling '. The provincial and general London vote was slightly in favour ; while of eleven London clubs assembled in conference to receive the vote, nine voted in favour and two against.

There appeared, therefore, no alternative to acceptance of the change. The Portland had ' officially ' called for a vote and had received an answer in favour of ' majority calling '. The answer in the case of the big London clubs mainly interested in the game was very definite. We all left the conference assured that ' majority calling ' had come to stay, and that it would in future be the only ' recognized ' method of bidding.

In the course of the next few days, however, two points occurred to me : (1) That most of those voting had no experience of ' majority calling ' ; and (2) that many,

quite ignorant of the system, had been largely influenced by flamboyant statements in the Press. Before permitting alteration of our game in this vital respect it occurred to me that it would be better and fairer to give players an opportunity of seeing how they liked it. Accordingly, I drafted a letter to the Portland Club, suggesting a four months' trial before adoption. The letter was accepted by the Club I represented and was sent in officially. The result was that the conference was reassembled specially to consider this suggestion. The voting on the proposal was eleven to one in favour.

Auction Bridge players were thereupon asked to give ' majority calling ' a four months' trial. The result of that trial is now old history ; the voting throughout the country as a whole veered round to a small majority against, while of twelve London clubs again assembled in conference only three now voted in favour.

The change of view among the chief card-playing London clubs was remarkable. Before trial the voting was nine to two *in favour* ; really nine to three in favour because the Portland Club did not vote. After trial the voting was nine to three *against.* At this final conference the three clubs voting in favour were White's, the National Liberal, and Almack's (now defunct).

It is of interest to record that only three members of the Portland Club voted in favour of ' majority calling '.

No figures were given by the representatives of White's, but it is well known that some of their most prominent players were definitely opposed to the proposed change.

The most remarkable turnover occurred at the Baldwin. As a result of the first ' snap ' vote their representatives spoke strongly in favour of ' majority calling '. At the final conference, after the four months' trial, they announced an overwhelming majority against.

STEMMING THE TIDE

I was all in favour of changes, if any were found desirable ; but before our game was altered in any vital respect I considered we should insist on full consideration and a reasonably long period of trial.

There is in fact very little difference between ' majority calling ' and value-bidding. The universal adoption of the former was finally turned down, not so much on grounds of intrinsic dislike for this method, but more as a result of the manner in which the demand for it was presented.

This demand was accompanied by a violent tirade against all English Bridge laws, and particularly against established authority in this country. If the public, influenced by ex-parte statements in a certain section of the Press, had given way, we should have found ourselves overwhelmed with ever-changing innovations and fantastic conventions.

The best answer to those who would foist these changes upon us is that in the country from which they emanate they are popular one day and discarded the next. In England, the man in the street wants to enjoy his game without making a business of it. He wants to know where he stands.

The rumpus which broke out in 1927 was of interest, because for the first time in the history of cards there was public controversy with regard to laws and other points.

As a precedent I welcomed it, because it is all to the good that the actions of those in authority should be subjected to constructive criticism. It is desirable that they should be made to feel the influence of public opinion. This particular hullaballoo, however, was undemocratic. It was revolutionary, and, like all revolutions, was engineered ' from the top '.

To understand the matter it is important to know how it all began. There is a small but noisy section of players who spend much of their spare time abroad at the various continental resorts, where American influence is paramount.

Armed with support from this source, the ringleaders at first proceeded to demand with great vehemence that we should pay homage to the New York *Whist* Club, where real 100 per cent Bridge is said to be played. In that they met with overwhelming opposition. This opposition was not racial. The American laws are not so good nor so well drafted as even the old Portland laws, although originally they were copied from them.

They then demanded the adoption of rules of their own ; but what those rules were, or how the public were to obtain copies of them, was never ascertainable. Finally, finding British opinion solidly against them, they grudgingly announced that they would agree to abide by the Portland rules. Then, however, they sought and found more subtle methods of causing chaos. At week-end parties, and in one or two clubs where their influence prevailed, they and their following adopted the American honours count. They induced the belief that this count is part and parcel of ' majority calling ', and that where the latter is played the other must necessarily be played in conjunction with it.

There is in fact no connexion whatever between the two. One could not help feeling that this move was merely a further attempt to split up the Bridge community and to undermine recognized authority. With one exception, this count was definitely rejected by all the well-known London clubs attending the conference. Moreover, of nearly 200 clubs throughout the country who were asked to submit their views on any change desired, not one favoured alteration of our rules in this respect.

This, however, had no influence on the irreconcilables. They said that the old honours count was ' antiquated ', and that wherever they went they never saw it played. As a matter of fact, there were then only two clubs in the whole country which had adopted it. Both are situated within a few yards of the Piccadilly end of Bond Street. There were other American practices favoured and loudly proclaimed to be desirable. They even disputed the cut,

alleging that the Ace was now the highest card for this purpose !

This small but noisy section was bound to be dissatisfied with the revised book of rules. The demand for the adoption of American laws had failed signally. It had been accompanied by violent attacks on the Portland Club. In these days such invective is seldom heard, even in politics. It met with the fate it deserved.

It is essential that there should be some authority to lay down the law and to legislate in accordance with the wishes of the majority Attempts to undermine that authority can only result in friction and discord. In the interests of the game, and with a view to maintaining unity, I make an appeal to Bridge players to turn a deaf ear to subversive propaganda, and to stand by the authority which they have always been pleased to recognize. It has served them well and deserves their continued confidence.

As is now well known, ' value ' bidding was retained but ' majority calling ' given ' permissive sanction '. Clubs and Bridge circles throughout the country ascertained the views of their members on the question, and committees ' laid down the law ' accordingly. Only in a very few large clubs, where half a dozen or more tables are formed daily, was it found practicable to have alternative methods. The position now is that if nothing to the contrary is said, guests at a club or strangers at private parties assume that ' value ' bidding is being played, because, after the four months' trial of ' majority calling ', the vast majority of players went back to the old English method.

Players who are in doubt about questions of law can refer any point of controversy to the Portland Club. The Card Committee are always prepared to adjudicate. In due course, a reply will be received from the genial and efficient secretary, Major H. O. Collyer.

CHAPTER XIV

GOOD LAWS AND BAD

CUTTING FOR PARTNERS

AT the final conference of London clubs at which the proposed new edition of the laws was discussed a certain amount of time was taken up by a delegate who strongly advocated an amendment of the law relating to the draw for partners and precedence. I was that delegate. In the face of determined opposition I had my way in principle. The law was altered, but not to the extent I wished.

Now, however, the ideal solution is forthcoming and is about to be adopted.

The cards will in future rank according to their suit values, in addition to the value previously attached to them for the purpose of cutting. The King of spades will be the highest card and the Ace of clubs the lowest. Thus, any club will be relatively a low card and any spade a high card. Formerly a cut of the 2 of spades would normally ensure partnership with a player who had already drawn the 2 of clubs, and equally a player who cuts the King of spades would normally partner the man who has drawn the King of clubs. In future, both the King of clubs and the 2 of clubs will be low cards, and the 2 of spades and the King of spades will be high cards.

Having taken the lead in the demand for alteration of the old law, I need hardly say that I welcome this change. I cordially acknowledge the support I received in this matter from my friend, the well-known writer—' Slam ' of the *Daily Telegraph*. Originally we were offered only the unsatisfactory arrangement of being forced to delay exposure of the cut until all had drawn from the pack. This was only a half measure.

It created an atmosphere of suspicion, and in many circles it was never practised or enforced.

In addition to abolishing this precedure, the new law has two advantages.

If there are such people as ' cutters ' it will knock them out completely. An ' expert ' may be able to cut at will cards which were formerly ranked as high or low, but he cannot pick out a spade or a club. That, presumably, is quite impossible.

Those who do not believe that cutting ' high and low ' is possible should equally welcome the change, because no longer will there be any talk about this unpleasant subject.

It is a fact that large numbers of players firmly believe that it is not merely possible but simple. On this ground alone it was important to bring in legislation and thereby remove suspicion—from which the perfectly innocent might suffer quite as much as the alleged guilty.

It was very unpleasant to hear people alleging these things. If a sensitive player turned up a low card he could easily feel that some one might think it had been done on purpose.

In principle, the new law merely follows precedent. It is not many years since two players who cut sevens or Kings, etc., had to draw again. After decades of card-playing somebody realized that this was unnecessary, and accordingly the 7 of hearts was made a higher card than the 7 of diamonds.

The new law is simply a desirable extension of this arrangement.

In view of its adoption, there is no need for me to go further into the matter.

It is an unpleasant subject. Let us forget.

LAWS THAT SHOULD BE ABOLISHED

I have still one or two points of criticism regarding the revised laws. One is the retention of the law which permits any player to break up a table in the middle of a game and

insist on the score being added up. He need not give prior notice of his intention nor any reason for his action. This law is open to abuse and should be abolished. In the case of illness, or urgency, or a rubber of exceptional length, no law is required ; the good sense of the table should suffice. But normally, when you sit down to a rubber of Bridge you make a contract to play that rubber.

Suppose you have piled up a big score above the line. You have no moral right to cancel completion of your contract on some inadequate pretext. Your opponents may think that the cards are at last turning against you. They are all out to ' get out of the mess '. The card-room waiter announces that a lady has called for you, or you get up and say you are dining at 8 o'clock. Other players may also be dining at 8. When you began the rubber at 7.30 you did not say that you would have to go at 7.50.

There is a rule which legislates for that. As for the lady, although the consequences to you may be unfortunate you have no right to consider her (and yourself) before the three players with whom you have contracted to play. Probably they have no interest in the lady at all. If you expected her you should have said so beforehand. If you did not expect her, and you have 500 above the line, you are indeed lucky ! You should be prepared to allow dummy, whoever he is, to go down from time to time and apologize to the lady.

Under the existing law you need not appoint a substitute. Even if you are prepared to agree, your partner may refuse to allow a bystander to finish the rubber for you. This is all wrong.

My other ' grouse ' is about the law which permits any player to call for new cards at any time on paying for them. This is a relic of the old gambling days and should be abolished. It can only apply in clubs, and even then only among players whose sole concern is money. There is a law under which if a card becomes torn or marked it can be replaced or a new pack called for. This should suffice.

The spectacle of two opposing gamblers calling for new cards after every hand (which the law I am criticizing permits) is unedifying and not in the interest of the game.

I remember on one occasion I hardly made a bid during five rubbers running which I lost to a certain player. I cut against him for the sixth rubber. My partner dealt and bid ' One no trumps '. I had two Aces, a King, and a Queen. When as dummy I put my hand down, my lucky adversary said : ' Great Scott, what cards ! ' He then rang the bell for fresh cards. He evidently thought his run of luck with those cards had turned. We just got the game, but that was the last success we had. We all had to wait some minutes while fresh cards were brought. My opponent then proceeded to choose his pack.

There is a law under which the player who cuts the lowest card has choice of cards ; but this can be upset at any time by a player who is prepared to pay 1*s.*, 2*s.*, 2*s.* 6*d.*, or whatever the charge for new cards happens to be. In practice, a player who demands fresh cards does not usually pay for them at all, for in many clubs packs of cards are available on a side table. In the case in point my adversary dealt himself a hand on which he obtained a little slam. Roused to fury, I myself called for more fresh cards (I had never before taken advantage of this law). There was further delay. Alas ! I was not successful, for I lost the rubber right away.

I then retired from the table. Had I gone on playing there was nothing to prevent my ' sportsman ' adversary and me from continuing this unseemly contest indefinitely (at 3*s.* a time). The points were such that the 3*s.* did not matter provided you won the rubber. Some may say : ' Can such things possibly happen at a game ? ' My reply is : ' Yes, they can and do happen '. This law exists, in fact, for the sole purpose of facilitating behaviour such as I have described.

You might just as well have a bowler at cricket keeping the whole match waiting while he walked back to the

pavilion at any time during the match to buy a new ball. This simile is not too apt, because the cricketer would have no direct money-interest in acting in this way. I wonder what the Oval crowd would say about it, if, in fact, it were allowed by law and any one dared to practise it. It is quite possible that the bowler in question would be physically incapacitated from ever bowling again! The fact is that it is not 'cricket'.

I brought this matter up at the London Conference, and I threw out a challenge. Appealing to an assembly which had the welfare of the game at heart, I asked any member to say what good purpose this law served. No one said a word and I received no support. I was daring to suggest cancellation of a law in existence since the first days of whist. I was up against precedent, that holy thing which throughout history has nearly always proved wrong.

As time goes on we achieve progress, but it is a slow and desperate struggle. What we have always done must be right, and therefore we will always do it. *Vanitas et vanitas et omne vanitatem.*

There is no other reason for retention of this law, but, as usual, that reason is all-sufficient. I could not even get any one to discuss the matter; but then, I fear this has often been the system on which these matters have been conducted. That is why Bridge laws have always been more or less of a joke. There was no attempt to deride me personally; nearly every suggestion put forward by any member of the Conference—and I don't remember one which had not sense in it—was treated in the same way by the other members. The prevailing idea was to get upstairs for a rubber of Bridge.

After the Conference, however, the Card Committee of the Portland, with able assistance from outside, took the question of Bridge laws seriously, and they spent time and consideration on them, particularly in the matter of drafting. Let us hope that, later on, the voice of common sense will prevail in other ways also.

CHAPTER XV

THE HONOURS COUNT

I AM glad the proposal to adopt the decimal system of scoring for honours was turned down. Advocates of this method say that it is simpler because there is one less column above the line to add up. Surely this is a futile reason to advance in its favour.

If this line of argument is to be taken seriously, why not extend it to its logical conclusion and count ten for every odd trick in each suit, thereby obviating the necessity for adding up the last column of figures below the line? Or, better still, why count anything for honours? Then you would have only to add up above the line for bonus and penalties. There is still a further course open to any one who dislikes adding up or is incapable of doing so. He need not play at all and can confine his interest in the game to bystanding!

My main objection to the decimal system is that it gives the lucky player a further advantage. It is significant that it is acclaimed by most of the good card-holders. Auction Bridge is to some extent a game of skill, and therefore scoring should, so far as is possible, be adjusted so that it serves as a reward for good play.

A game or a slam or a penalty may often be achieved by skill, but where is the skill in holding honours? One can sit rubber after rubber without being able to open one's mouth—without having a dog's chance. A trick or two here and there gained by the opponents may be due to their skill, but often their success is the result of sheer weight of good cards and good luck.

Why, in such circumstances, should they gain an additional advantage owing to the purely fortuitous circumstance of holding certain valuable cards called

'honours'? Honour may be achieved at the game, but there is no honour in holding honours. If you are lucky enough to hold cards of value you should be satisfied with the chance thereby given you of displaying sufficient skill to win the rubber. With the exception of your score for honours, everything you make below or above the line may be due in whole or in part to skill.

Your score of 12 (or, worse still, 30) for three honours in clubs, or 16 (or, worse still, 30) for three honours in hearts is sheer luck. I can find no ground for it at all. It is retained solely for the usual stupid reason that it has always been done. I do not know why this system stopped where it did. Why not score 50 for having seven cards in one suit and 100 for having eight? Why not score 75 for having three Aces and one King? Why not score 25 for the Ace of clubs, 50 for the Ace of hearts, and so on.

These arrangements would affect the bidding more than (say) the 14 that is now scored for three honours in diamonds.

At Contract, of course, simple honours are eliminated altogether. This consideration brings me to the question of the big scores obtainable at Auction for four or more honours in one hand. Personally, I would prefer to eliminate any scoring for honours; but there is the point that the holding of four or more honours in one hand may affect the bidding and therefore may justify an additional reward for skill.

There is the further point that the holding of four or more honours in one hand is easily remembered. The worst feature regarding scoring of honours is that it often involves an unnecessary effort of memory after each hand. Where the question is one of obtaining 12 or 14, or even 30, the effort of memory involved is out of all proportion to the trifling result.

If we estimate the number of Bridge players in the world and multiply that figure by the number of hands played by them in any one year we shall arrive at some

colossal total. I suggest that at least one-quarter of that figure represents the number of times per annum a question has been raised, thought out, and answered regarding who had the honours. Think of the enormous waste of energy in this. It is all expended to very little purpose—a sheer question of luck as to which side had 12, 14, 16, and so on.

It is said that some time ago there was a man who at high points made between £300 and £400 per annum by occasionally claiming the 10 of trumps when he had not held it. It was estimated that, at £5 per 100, he had made on an average about 20 points a day for about 340 days each year.

Then, again, there is the more authenticated story of the player who estimated that during a bad run lasting three months he had lost about £1,200, solely as a result of playing in a club which had adopted the decimal system. He played about ten rubbers daily.

During the course of each of these ten rubbers the adversaries held simple honours in suit calls on an average twice more often than he and his partner. Therefore, on balance they scored each rubber $30 \times 2 = 60$, instead of the 30 arrived at by multiplying by 2 the average figure (15) of 18, 16, 14, and 12. Thus the difference to him was 30 points in each of the ten rubbers daily. That makes 300 points daily for 90 days. At £5 per 100 that comes to £1,350.

I have exaggerated the actual facts with regard to simple honours in order to save a dissertation regarding the difference between the decimal system and the English one in the case where four or more honours in one hand are held, and also the difference between four honours in (say) clubs (not in one hand) = 40 and the same distribution under our system = 24. I have merely produced sufficient evidence in the way of figures to show that an unlucky player can be further penalized to a considerable extent by the American count.

CHAPTER XVI

AMERICAN CONTRACT

UP to now Britain has always led the world at cards. At whist our word was law, and so it was at ordinary Bridge, and later at Auction. A few years ago the French introduced the Contract element into Auction Bridge. They labelled the new game ' Plafond ', and at once it became popular in France, Switzerland, and Holland. It has since been played in these and certain other European countries, to the exclusion of Auction Bridge.

The only vital difference between the two games is that at Plafond no player can score below the line for tricks made in excess of his declared contract. Thus, if the final declaration is ' Two hearts ', and the declarer makes four by cards, he can score only 16 below the line. His two extra tricks count as bonus, and are scored above the line. It follows that a player cannot go game unless he calls it. If he is 16 up and is left in with a bid of ' Two hearts ' and makes it, that will give him game. But if there is no score below the line he would have to bid ' Four hearts ' to go game. There are highish rewards for making slams if bid, but nothing for slams, as such, if not bid.

It was I who endeavoured to introduce this game into London, under the name of ' Contract Bridge '. It was not liked at the Portland. The consistent winners were content with the game in vogue, and the consistent losers thought they might lose more. However, I got it going in several other clubs. It was played in these for some time, and then it died out. It was popular among those who played it, but it received no ' official ' support, and the general public did not get to hear of it. Later it was tried in America. It faded out there also.

I come now to more recent events in the history of Bridge. By 1925–1926 Auction Bridge, already popular, became in America almost a vice. It was taken up strenuously and seriously by every one. Teaching, writing, and lecturing became profitable professions, and no effort was spared to get the utmost advantage from the element of skill in the game. As I have said in a previous chapter, the result is that the average American is probably a better player than the average Englishman. He has worked harder at it, and has taken more trouble to become proficient. The best American players, however, are not up to the standard of our best players. They have not the same inborn card experience.

In their insensate desire to 'improve' the game, the 'heads' introduced a number of set conventions, which tended to make it mechanical. It was no longer necessary for a player to use common sense. All he had to do was to read and commit to memory a series of complicated instructions. Some of these were so fantastic that no nation with real card sense would put up with them for a moment. They would ruin any card game. Gradually this fact dawned on the long-suffering American public, with the result that the more foolish conventions were discarded. Only one or two were retained. Even the so-called convention 'the Informatory Double' is now used sparingly.

But this inevitable situation did not suit the professional element. They got together and thought out a plan. They said: 'If we introduce the Contract element and change the scoring we can gratify our lust for convention. Contract on a big scale is essentially a game of conventions.'

The result was the launching on the world of American Contract.

Like the Woolworth building and the dollar, everything was made big. Clubs at 6 a trick was considered small. They made it 20. Ten for 'No trumps' was petty. They made it 35 a trick. Other changes were introduced.

With a view to shortening the rubber they decided that if you were a game up you should be heavily penalized for failure in your endeavour to win rubber game. This has the effect of preventing wild over-calling. It is not uncommon for a player who has misjudged the hand or has met with a freak distribution to go down 1,800 !

They decided to give 500 to the winner of the rubber in three games and 700 to the winner in two games.

To bid a slam was rightly considered a big thing, and therefore the reward was made colossal. If you bid and make a grand slam when you are a game up—you score 1,500.

The game caught on in America, and to some extent on the Continent. In England it was first taken up by that section of society which can best be described as ' cosmopolitan '. Later it invaded the club world. It became popular at the St. James', introduced there originally by Lord Lascelles (as he then was) and Mr. ' Jimmie ' Rothschild. At first I held out against it and ' ragged ' its sponsors. We greeted Mr. Rothschild with shouts of ' Author ! ' from time to time when he entered the room. Soon, however, its merit was recognized, and partly as a result of my advocacy it was taken up by the Portland. Since then its influence has been gradually spreading in clubland, though it has been slow to take root among the general body of Bridge players in London and the provinces.

Some condemn the game absolutely, while with others it is a positive obsession.

In three of the clubs to which I belong any suggestion that a rubber of Auction should be played would be greeted with derision. On the other hand, in many other clubs only an odd rubber of Contract is got up now and again.

In clubs where the game has become the vogue it is surprising how little trouble has been taken to acquire knowledge of it. Even after a prolonged period of trial many players are still bidding as they would at Auction. I do not mean that they are not taking the Contract

principle into account, but from first to last the bidding should be quite different, and many have failed to realize this. In most circles, in fact, the game in progress is, in a sense, practically Auction, though it is called Contract.

Statements have appeared in the Press to the effect that there is very little difference between the two games and that any Auction Bridge player can pick up Contract in a few rubbers. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Any one can of course jog along and enjoy the game from the start, but I would go so far as to say that in some cases a knowledge of Auction Bridge is almost a disadvantage for those who desire to excel at Contract. They start on a wrong basis, and it is very difficult to get them out of Auction habits. The two games differ as does chalk from cheese.

It is true that any one with natural card sense can pick up this new game, or, for that matter, any new game of cards, quickly. I recall an incident which will serve to convey my meaning.

A bystander asked a player why he had made a certain bid. It was one that should not have been made at Auction. The reply was : ' Because I am playing Contract Bridge. For the time being I have forgotten Auction.'

The player in question is famous for his skill at cards. If some further new form of Bridge were introduced he would grasp its essential features and the differences between it and any other in about half an hour.

But how many have card sense of this order ?

It is surprising what a number of first-rate Auction players there are who have no real card sense. Contract has found them out. Instead of grasping the game quickly they are floundering about as if they had never played cards before.

Soon after I started playing the game I cut with a partner whose name is a household word. He was one of the pioneers who introduced the game into London club circles. He would be the last to pose as an authority on any form

of Bridge but he took a great fancy to the American system. In the middle of a hand, I was criticizing one of the more silly features of the game, when he turned to me with that broad smile which is such a delight to his friends and said : ' When you've played this game long enough to understand it, you'll like it.'

My reply was immediate, albeit somewhat of a *tu quoque* : ' I understood this game the first week I played it ; when you've played it long enough to understand it you'll hate it.' My gallant partner admitted that this was ' not bad '.

Put shortly, the position is as follows :

(1) If you have natural card sense you will learn the new game quickly, and you will like it.

(2) If you are a good Auction Bridge player, without real card sense you will enjoy the game from the start, but it will take you some considerable time to master its intricacies.

(3) If you are not a good Auction Bridge player you will never become good at Contract, and you will lose more.

WHAT OF THE FUTURE ?

It cannot be said that Contract Bridge has spread rapidly in this country. On the contrary, the vast majority are at present remaining true to Auction. They have not even attempted to give Contract a trial. This is surprising. In America, Contract Bridge is all the rage ; it increases in popularity every day, and the time may not be far distant when it will supersede Auction altogether. In England, Contract had a good start. I have explained that early on it was taken up by the Portland and by other well-known London card-playing clubs. In this respect it had an advantage which Auction did not enjoy. This latter game was widely played before the Portland adopted it. It became so popular that the Portland were forced to recognize its existence and to legislate for it. This time one or two of us took a view about American

Contract, and we induced the Portland to give it a trial. We felt that the club should become a pioneer rather than again find themselves in the position of following on long after the event. So far the results have certainly not justified our action. The country as a whole has not yet followed the lead—this, despite the fact that the new game has had what is called a 'good Press'. Within living memory no game has been more written up than this. Were we, then, wrong in our view? Is Contract Bridge a failure—a game which will shortly die out and never again be heard of? Prophecy is always rash, but I must say what I think.

In my view there is not the slightest doubt that Contract in one form or another will eventually supersede Auction in this and in every other country. Why is it then that the American version, officially sponsored and widely advertised, has failed to catch on? It is lethargy—nothing else. The average man likes Auction; he has taken a good deal of trouble to learn something about it. He enjoys it, and he cannot be bothered to start learning another game. He is wrong, and in due course he will recognize the fact. I say without hesitation that he is missing something.

As soon as he finds that out he will take it up. This is not merely a personal opinion; it is based on the fact that so far no player who has given Contract a trial has in my experience expressed any desire to go back to Auction. The fact is that it is a better game. It is more interesting more thrilling, more satisfying, and more enjoyable than Auction. Bridge enthusiasts should therefore take it up now. They will be glad that they have done so.

I have come to the conclusion that the fascination of Contract is due mainly to the fact that thrills in bidding are frequent, while at Auction they are few and far between. When there are freak hands about, or peculiar distributions, Auction gives you all the thrill you want. A decision whether to make a final bid of 'Five diamonds' rather than to double the adversaries' 'Four hearts' is just the

sort of thing which raises Auction above the level of many other card games. But how often do these positions arise ? The more normal thing is for some one to bid ' One heart ' or ' One no trumps ' and for no further bidding to arise. Thus at Auction, dull bidding is the rule ; at Contract it is the exception. Interest in bidding was the factor which caused Auction to oust ordinary Bridge, and to achieve world-wide popularity. The most fanatical opponent must admit that at Contract the bidding interest is increased and enlarged. Inevitably, therefore, Contract must in due course supersede Auction. It is surprising what a dull game Auction can be when played by mediocre performers. That is why bystanders are seldom to be found except in first-class circles. Auction played by experts provides quite as much interest for the onlookers as for the players. The bidding is spirited throughout and no one is allowed to score anything without a struggle.

At Contract, we get this intense interest even in the humblest Bridge circles. I am always prepared to watch a first-class rubber of Auction. Equally I enjoy watching any sort of rubber of Contract. Bad Auction is boring, but Contract is never dull.

If the players are unenterprising they will find themselves involved in ' Goulash ' hands. These always create fun and amusement.

If we use the American version as a basis, and take steps to improve it, we may obtain universal sanction for a form of Bridge greatly superior to any now played. I should like to see ordinary Bridge, Auction Bridge, Plafond, and American Contract all ' put into a hat ' and something good drawn out.

There are many features which tend to make the new game more interesting than Auction. At the latter, when your partner makes a bid such as ' One no trumps ' or ' One spade ', which suits your hand, normally you pass.

In the absence of bidding by opponents you can afford to sit still, and take no risks, confident that if the game is

there it will be made. You can laze in your chair and watch the proceedings without effort.

At Contract, however, you have to be alert the whole time. Directly your partner speaks, the important question immediately arises whether you can ' raise ' him, and, if so, to what extent.

Even when game has been bid your problems are not solved. The question of slams remains. At Auction the fight, if any, is between two sides as to which pair will obtain the final declaration.

At Contract the struggle may be between partners who have to consider to what lengths they can go even when there is no opposition. This provides the main fascination of the game. It is this which causes those who have taken up Contract to feel dull and listless when on occasion they return to a rubber of Auction.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

My first experience of Contract was alarming. It was at Lady Oxford's house in Bedford Square. Lady Oxford is an inveterate enthusiast and the most charming of players. After dinner three tables of Bridge were arranged. There were two of Auction and one of Contract, and I found myself detailed to play Contract.

Though this was before the game had been played in any London club, it was evidently assumed that I knew it. My hostess had already started her game of Auction, and there was nothing I could do but sit down and make the best of it. I had, of course, played Plafond many years before, but I had forgotten it.

Moreover, I had heard that American Contract differed from it greatly. I explained to the table that I had never played it. The points were high, but no one suggested reducing them. Nor was I conscious of any particular feeling of sympathy for me in the position in which I found myself.

I was told I could pick it up as I went along! As I did not even know the scoring, this display of nonchalance on the part of the table merely served to complete my discomfiture.

Suddenly I became conscious that some one had dealt. I picked up my cards and proceeded to win every rubber. People are apt to go by results, and I fear my story that I had never played before was hardly believed.

To-day many keen players hesitate to take up Contract because they are afraid to make a start. I have recounted my own experience to show that there is really nothing to be frightened about. Players can 'pick it up as they go along'. They can start by playing for nominal stakes in the family circle.

They will not have to go through my ordeal, which was equivalent to being thrown into deep water in order to learn swimming. Of course I happened to hold enormous cards, which more than compensated for my mistakes.

Looking back, after I had acquired more knowledge, I realized that I had made many more than I was conscious of at the time.

Whether fortune smiles on you or not, mistakes are inevitable at first. You must give yourself the chance of making them before you can hope to become good at the game.

At the start you will jog along somehow, and you will find that with each new rubber the interest increases and your knowledge expands.

Thus there is no foundation for the idea that insuperable difficulties will be encountered by the Auction player when he first takes up Contract.

The average man is keen on Auction. He looks forward to his game. He feels that if he tries Contract he will have to spend weeks, if not months, struggling with something new. During this period he will not be enjoying himself. Instead of getting relaxation he will be 'back at school'.

He has been told that Contract is a better game, but he is not prepared to forgo his daily pleasure on the chance that later on he might like it better. He is not convinced that the effort and the bother of it all will be worth while.

I have met with this attitude everywhere. Moreover, there is a widespread feeling that Contract is a much more difficult game, and that the good player has an overwhelming advantage. This latter point has been much stressed.

Thus, the average player has hesitated to embark on a new game at which he feels he may be outclassed.

Let me reassure him.

It is true that in first-class company the poor player has far less chance at Contract than he has at Auction.

The finer points of the new game are more subtle, and there is much greater opportunity for display of skill and judgement.

But in the average circle this fact is not of great consequence. If you are not in first-class company you will find that the ordinary features of Contract present no greater difficulty than do those of Auction.

In short, experts have a greater advantage over the average and the poor player, but the average player's mastery over the bad player is no greater than it is at Auction.

Arising from this statement is the answer to the objection that Contract will take a long time to learn. First-class Contract, yes; and so will, in lesser degree, first-class Auction. But the ordinary game can be picked up in a few rubbers.

The idea that Auction players will be condemned to weeks and months of strain and worry before they can hope to find real enjoyment in a rubber of Contract is fallacious. The average player will enjoy the second rubber he plays, and the bad player will find real pleasure in it from the third rubber onwards.

The first stumbling-block is the great difference in scoring values. I recognize that the scoring at Contract is complicated. Thousands will admit that this is the chief reason why they have not taken up the game. Yet it is remarkable how quickly the new figures can be assimilated, once a start has been made. The average player will pick it all up in a couple of rubbers.

There is no real difficulty, particularly as at love score the same number of tricks in ' No trumps ' and in each suit are required for game as at Auction. Clubs and diamonds are each 20 a trick, and spades and hearts 30 a trick, but as game is 100, five by cards in either minor suit and four by cards in either major are required for game, as at Auction. Similarly, no trumps being 35 a trick, ' Three no trumps ' is the minimum which will give game.

Such differences as there are in this connexion are very slight. For instance, if you bid ' Three diamonds ', and make it, you score 60, and ' One no trumps ' next time, being only 35, will not give you game. At Auction, of course, ' One no trumps ' would make game if you were 21 up.

Once the scoring has been mastered—and this, as I have pointed out, presents no real difficulty—all you have to remember at the start is that you must bid game if you want to score it.

At Auction you may be quite satisfied that you have a ' One no trumps ' bid or a ' Two hearts ' bid, and you hope to go game. At Contract you and your partner have to consider whether or not at love score you have a ' Three no trumps ' bid or a ' Four hearts ' bid, because you cannot get game unless you call it.

I have no hesitation in saying that once this elementary fact has been grasped any Bridge player who takes up Contract will enjoy the game from the outset.

There will be no question of weeks and months of struggle and striving. It is true that few of the finer points can be quickly learned, but as to this every one is in

the same boat. The second or third rubber of the evening will be quite as enjoyable as any game of Auction, and as more rubbers are played the wide field for further development will create the greatest possible interest.

The proof of the pudding is in the eating. I have said that in my experience, which is wide and varied, I have not yet found a player who has tried Contract who has ever expressed any desire to go back to Auction.

I had thought that by now, Contract would have practically swept the country. It has everything in its favour. All sorts are catered for.

The cautious player will think it a great improvement on Auction. He can lie low and hope to make huge scores above the line. The enterprising player will find that he can 'get away with it' much more often and to greater advantage.

The gambler comes into his own, and so does the steady player who is content to await his opportunity. The poor player who is lucky will think that he is good, or, alternatively, that there is little or no skill in the game. He will have a regular feast of opportunity for success on a large scale.

That 700 for rubber in two games will delight him. If he holds the cards he will score it rubber after rubber, no matter how well his adversaries play.

Equally, the good player who is unlucky will have still less chance than at Auction. He may be one of the finest players in the world and yet find the game very expensive. The vast majority, however, are average players with average luck. For these Contract is a great improvement on Auction. There is more skill and more thrill.

The fact that the game has not yet caught on to any very great extent is due to instinctive British dislike of anything new. In most clubs the difficulty is to find some one enterprising enough to induce others to make a start.

If there were but one pioneer in every club, Auction would by now be practically extinct.

I have been a member for twenty-four years of a well-known provincial club. Recently I visited it after many years' absence and found that no one had even thought of starting a rubber of Contract.

At 5 o'clock, the first arrival appeared in the card-room, a local doctor, whom I had known for many years. 'No,' he said, 'it's no use trying it here; they're bad enough at Auction.'

As he was speaking two more members arrived.

All three were busy men looking forward to the relaxation of a rubber or two.

They were delighted to see me because it meant that not a moment would be wasted. They assumed I would 'make them up'. My suggestion of a rubber of Contract proved unpopular, all three saying they had never played it.

During the next quarter of an hour I used every forensic device to make them believe that they could pick it up at once. I endeavoured to explain that after the first rubber or two they would be quite at home; that there was no basis for their attitude: it was a better game, and they would get more fun and enjoyment out of it.

They were adamant, so I played my trump card. Having some knowledge of card players I produced an ultimatum. I said I had not played Auction for some months past, and would play nothing but Contract. There were furtive glances towards the door to see if any one else was at hand. Finally they agreed to try a rubber of Contract.

I had rightly guessed they would play any game rather than sit doing nothing. I suggested that the first rubber should be played for 'love'. This created dissension.

Two of the players were obviously bored at the idea. They had come in to have their mild gamble at bridge. They were not accustomed to playing for nothing, and could not bear the thought of it even for one rubber. The third was more cautious. He knew so little of cards that he assumed I was certain to win, and he was not prepared to gamble on the chance of cutting me as a partner.

I therefore had my way. We all got on splendidly. Of course many questions were asked about the scoring and other points.

The advantage of playing for nothing was that these could be answered during the course of play.

On such occasions the man who knows the game is usually the loser. I was astonished therefore to find that my partner and I won the rubber.

Perhaps it was because I was playing for ' love '. There followed an insistant demand for another rubber, and a unanimous decision to play for money. The cautious man had been my partner, and he had won !

While it was proceeding many more members entered the card-room, but instead of settling down to their rubbers of Auction they crowded round our table—their first opportunity to watch the new game in progress.

The three men at my table were all regular card-players, and, as I would expect, they played the second rubber like veterans. I am not suggesting that any of them were first-class Bridge players, merely that they played practically as well as they would have played at Auction.

I had to leave that night to get back to town, but I have since heard that nothing but Contract is now played in this club.

THE SLAM FEATURE

I think that in some respects the new game is badly constructed. In the first place, it is a game of slams rather than one of games and rubbers.

I do not think even Americans realize this fully, though slam bidding must have been the object of its founders. American writers have recently attempted to shelve the real position by laying little stress on the slams.

But no attempt has yet been made to alter the scoring values accordingly. Thus the present position is anomalous.

The game as it stands has led to two features: ultra-conservative bidding at all stages and conventions.

Let me give an example of the former:

In one of the text-books players are advised on no account to bid more than 'One diamond' on the following hand: Spades—Queen, 4, 2; Hearts—10, 9; Diamonds—Ace, King, Queen, 10, 9, 7, 6; Clubs—Knave.

On another page the following hand is given: Spades—King, 4, 2; Hearts—King, Queen, 10; Diamonds—10, 8; Clubs—Queen, Knave, 9, 4, 3. The instruction given about this hand is as follows: 'Your partner bids "One diamond". [This is a coincidence: in the book it has obviously no reference to the previous hand.] There is no use in calling on this hand: it is a good defensive hand and nothing more!'

Now, between these two hands (suitably altered) it will be seen there is a fine chance for game in no trumps, and yet the partner of the player who bids 'One diamond' must not even say 'One no trumps'.

It is true that bidding at Contract should be more conservative than at Auction; but these examples I have given carry backward calling to an extreme. The reason for it is obvious: it is held to be a game of slams as the first consideration.

The value of obtaining something below the line (say 60 by a bid of 'Two hearts') is great. Yet such a call is hazardous because your partner may put you with greater strength than you have, and may bid up towards a slam with disastrous consequences.

This is one of my reasons for saying that the game is badly constructed. From the examples I have given, a mere novice will see that if the bidding should proceed on the lines shown a great many hands will be 'thrown in'.

The inventors of the game realized this, and dealt with it. They introduced 'the Goulash.' This is a device which tends towards slam bidding. If none of the four players

thinks he has a game bid or one that might lead up to game or slam, all pass.

Then comes ' the Goulash '. Each hand should be sorted into suits in the normal way for play. The dealer places his cards in a packet face downwards on the table. Fourth in hand places his cards on the top of the dealer's ; then third in hand, and then second in hand.

The pack thus made up is cut by fourth in hand, and the dealer deals again. He deals in packets of five cards to each player, five cards again on the second round, and the remaining twelve cards in packets of three each. This arrangement usually produces freak hands on which slams can be bid. Only recently I doubled a final bid of ' Seven hearts ' with the Ace of clubs bare and Ace of spades bare in my hand. Both Aces were ruffed.

' Goulash ' is a very apt word. It is Hungarian. It means a sort of mixed grill. It provides an amusing diversion, but it is often possible to calculate exactly where many of the cards originally held are subsequently placed.

Let me explain why I insist so much on the slam element.

At Auction the main object is to get game, and when that has been achieved the next step is to get another game and thereby win the rubber. In the course of effort in this direction subsidiary objectives present themselves.

It is important, at small cost if possible, to prevent opponents from going game. And when they, in their turn, act in such a way as to thwart you in your main objective, you have your remedy. You penalize them. They achieve their object, but only at a cost. Whether they are wise or not depends solely on the size of the penalty paid. Thus, though these secondary considerations arise, the real thing is the winning of the game and rubber. And why ? Because it is so valuable (250).

In the early days of Bridge the tendency was to go for penalties rather than for game. It was, however, found that this policy did not pay. Small penalties were exacted on hands which would have given game, and, finally,

opponents got away with the rubber. This paid them well, for the sole reason, already stated, that the value of the rubber is 250, which means that the difference between winning and losing it is 500.

This should be common knowledge ; but, even at this late hour in the history of Auction Bridge, repetition can do no harm. There are still many thousands who have not fully grasped basic facts.

Now, reviewing American Contract in this light and with reference to these considerations, how are we to regard it ? How does it differ in this general sense ? My answer is that it differs profoundly.

Trick values have been radically altered, but this change is not of great importance. Clubs are no longer 6 a trick but 20. The value of each trick at no trumps is 35, instead of 10. To go game, one has to score 100 instead of 30. Rubber game is worth 500 or 700, according to whether opponents are vulnerable or not vulnerable.

These figures are at first confusing, but relatively they are nearly the same as at Auction. When points have been reduced by about one-third, the result is similar. The same number of tricks in each suit and in no trumps is required for game ; and in normal rubbers, subject to the reduction of points to which I have referred, the settling will work out on lines identical with Auction Bridge.

These alterations in the scoring are simply the result of American desire to make everything loom large. I have little doubt that in a few years' time our cousins from across the sea will be dissatisfied with their work and will alter the scoring again. In 1940 (or will it be next year ?) clubs will be 200 a trick and no trumps 350 ; but with the consequent reduction in stakes it will all come to the same thing.

As I have said, I have never seen the New York sky-scrapers, and I have no acquaintance with the dollar. But I rather wish I could be alive a hundred years hence. How exhilarating it would be to bid 'One diamond'

and score 2,000 below the line! With regret I must leave these Wellsian glimpses into the future and get down to present-day fact, such as the ' Gilbertian Goulash '.

At all card games the object is to get the utmost out of the hands which are dealt to you. At Auction that object, in the main, is, as I have said, the winning of the rubber. At Contract it is not. It is the winning of grand slam when vulnerable, which of course includes the rubber.

If you must never go for a grand slam, what conceivable object is there in giving it a value three times as great as the rubber? If it is to enable a player to score a colossal bonus once a year when he has a certain grand slam in his own hand, then it is futile. It is merely a premium on overwhelming cards.

We have recalled that at Auction the rubber is worth 250 and that at Contract it is worth 500 (or 700). At Contract the grand slam if bid is worth, if not vulnerable, 1,000; and if vulnerable 1,500. The small slam is worth 500 if not vulnerable, 750 if vulnerable. It is therefore clear that the main object of this game is to get a slam, particularly as its achievement includes the making of game. If we assume, for example, that both sides are vulnerable, then a game bid and made is worth 500 (relatively less than rubber game at Auction).

But the grand slam bid and made is worth 500 plus 1,500 = 2,000! If, therefore, on the ground of its value, the main objective at Auction is to get game and rubber, it is obvious that for a similar reason the prize to go for at Contract is the grand slam. That being the case, freak calls are on occasion necessary, for without them slam bidding is risky.

Happily, however, set conventions need not be practised. On the contrary, bidding for a slam is purely a matter of common sense.

THE THRILL OF SLAM BIDDING

I have heard players say they ' hate this slam business ', but it is there as an important part of the game, and it is futile to ignore it. Given judgement and skill, partners who go for slams on occasions which appear propitious will always beat those who are satisfied to bid only for game. The former will sometimes score 500, 1,000, and so on, which the latter will miss.

It would be just as illogical to refrain from bidding ' No trumps ' for game at Auction on the ground that a bid in a minor suit was more safe and would provide a certain small score below the line.

Slam bidding is, however, a ticklish business. To attempt it with a partner who does not understand the special meaning of late bids is the height of folly.

One cannot, however, get away from the fact that it is exciting and enthralling. It is easy to go wrong and the penalty for lack of success is heavy. In good company a case can hardly arise in which failure to make a slam, when bid, does not result in throwing away game. No question of such moment can ever arise at Auction.

In my view this is one of the chief fascinations of the new game. At Auction you can be heavily penalized for over-calling, but you probably achieve your objective, which is to save game.

At Contract bidding for slams which do not materialize is very expensive, because you pay a double penalty. You lose above the line and you miss going game.

The ' slam business ' is therefore a feature which calls for the exercise of intense concentration.

If you bid a slam and fail to get it you have shown lack of judgement. On the other hand, if you make a slam which you have not bid you are conscious of the fact that you have not made the most of your cards. I give some examples of slam bidding in the next chapter.

CRITICISMS OF CONTRACT

One of the objections to American Contract is that it is said to be much more of a gambling game than Auction.

A discussion in the Press on somewhat heated lines has taken place on this point. I agree with the writer who said that the poker element is largely eliminated from Contract.

In bidding at Auction, gambling implied over-calling. If you make gambling bids at Contract on the chance that they will come off you will lose heavily. Your bluff will be called every time.

There is only one situation when over-calling within reason may be justified. That is when the opponents are something up below the line. You may then make a risky bid in order to prevent them from going game on a small contract. This applies particularly when they are vulnerable and you are not. Your possible loss may be small when compared with their possible gain.

Apart from such a case as this, the only legitimate gamble at Contract is a pass on a good hand on the chance of your opponents bidding up for a game which they cannot get.

I am never an advocate of under-calling at any form of Bridge, but at the new game ' Lying low ' may on occasion be advantageous.

A favourable opportunity often arises when you are third in hand. Suppose your partner passes, and second in hand opens the bidding. You do not see a reasonable chance of game yourself, but you are sure your opponents cannot get a game contract. You make a bluff pass, and, as a well-known player said : ' Look as if you have nothing.'

Of course your opponents may not go on and may make a small contract, while, had you bid, you could have made a small contract yourself. When this happens you have obviously done the wrong thing—you have had your little gamble and failed.

But on another occasion you may make a handsome

profit, particularly when you are playing against risky bidders—the wrong sort of gamblers at Contract.

Subject to these examples, I agree that Contract is a more solid game than Auction, and has less of the gambling element.

There is of course the point that the size of an odd rubber at Contract may be out of all proportion to the normal rubber.

Let us take an example. You are asked to play Auction at the modest stake of 1*s.* a 100. You expect to play about six rubbers, and you provide yourself with £2 in cash. That should more than suffice, even if you lose every rubber.

When you arrive some one suggests Contract, and in accordance with custom the stakes are reduced to 4*d.* per 100. In the normal way that would be the equivalent of 1*s.* per 100 at Auction. But supposing the very first rubber is not normal ; you go down 1,000, possibly through no fault of yours, and then two grand slams are bid and made against you.

You lose a rubber of 5,000 and have to pay out 16*s.* 8*d.* You have only £1 3*s.* 4*d.* left after the first rubber !

Taking an exceptional rubber, the figures I have given are not unduly exaggerated.

In this sense it is like six-pack bezique. Assuming similar stakes, you may play game after game and win or lose 1*s.* or 1*s.* 6*d.* Then suddenly you will find that without any possible defence you have lost £1 in one game.

In a restricted sense the word ' gambling ' fully applies to such games. Any card game in which these big scores are possible is a bit of a gamble, because, like Stock Exchange speculation, you cannot limit your loss within a reasonable figure.

On the other hand, it must be admitted that successful slam scoring does not often arise. Sometimes gambling opponents will make a score rather out of proportion to the general trend of the game, but in the meantime they will

have lost heavily by continually risking loss of game in mad attempts to score a slam.

It is possible to gamble at any game of cards. But if a ' gambler's ' game is one in which the gambler as such is likely to prove successful, then this is the most misleading possible description of Contract.

Even if we permit ourselves to dwell on the slam feature, in fairness we should recognize that normally there is more skill (and therefore less gambling) in scoring a slam at Contract than at Auction.

When there are slams about the Auction player usually ' gets there ' without any display of ability in bidding. At Contract, scoring a slam involves a high degree of skill in bidding.

The good player who bids and makes a slam fully deserves his reward. The gambler who bids a slam and fails is heavily penalized. Strictly speaking, therefore, it is not a gambler's game.

Bridge superseded whist because it was less scientific and therefore more of a gamble. Auction Bridge was a further step in the same direction. It was better suited to those who wanted easy relaxation.

If Contract were a more gambling game than Auction it would by now have swept the country. The majority find Auction difficult enough. They are glad that only on occasion have they to sum up the exact value of their hands. To have to do so every deal is too much like hard work.

Considerable controversy has been aroused as to whether the rubbers at American Contract normally take longer than those at Auction. It will be remembered that the main objection to the original form of Contract was the inordinate length of the rubbers. It was not uncommon for a rubber to last an hour and a half, or even two hours.

The American version, with its heavy penalties for over-calling has had the effect of shortening the rubber

considerably ; but it is still an open question whether the average rubber at Auction is not over in quicker time. My own view is that it is all a question of how the game is played.

In some circles, bidding is ultra-conservative, and this tends to shorten the rubber. One side will often be permitted to play a hand in a small contract and get it. In the next hand another small contract will give them game, and they are left in without a struggle. The opponents are too frightened to oppose them.

There are players who go to the other extreme. At all costs they are out to prevent their adversaries from getting a cheap contract. It is sometimes very expensive, but it keeps the game going.

Then there are clubs in which the ' Goulash ' is barred. I have sat down to a table at which half the time has been spent in dealing the cards. Hand after hand is thrown in, because all the players are too nervous to make an opening bid. When the ' Goulash ' comes into operation it is seldom that the hands are passed. More often than not a game is made by one side or the other, and frequently a slam. The ' Goulash ' cannot appeal to any one with card sense, but it is certainly advantageous in its effect on the length of the rubber.

Apart from this, we in this country have only recently taken up American Contract, and, as yet, there is no standardized method of play. Later on, when we have further experience, I think certain general principles will become more widely accepted, and when that time arrives I do not think the average rubber will last longer than it did at Auction. One of the chief reasons for the length of the rubber at present is the controversy which goes on after practically every hand. To some extent this is natural, because the game is new and players are keen to learn and to explore into its possibilities. But even among those who have considerable experience, prolonged discussion after each hand takes place.

Contract lends itself easily to this. There are so many points in connexion with bidding which could not arise in Auction. Controversy is engendered in connexion with what you have not bid rather with what you have. If partners get enough tricks for a game which they have not bid, the question as to which of them was at fault immediately arises. In such cases my experience is that the player invariably blamed is the one who finally closes the bidding by passing, but it does not necessarily follow that he was in the wrong.

Many players expect their partners to call their hands for them. They bid one of a suit when they should bid ' Two ' or ' Three ' and are then surprised that they are not ' put up '.

For the time being comment and controversy is to be expected.

One of the best Auction players in London has been known for a long time past as ' The Coroner '. Nowadays, ' inquests ' are so frequent that he is called ' The Coroner-in-Chief '.

THE PHILADELPHIA

Many who have become intrigued with the ' Goulash ' have heard of the ' Philadelphia ', but they do not know what it is. So far as I know, it has never been explained in this country. Even American books do not refer to it.

It is not played in clubs, either in the United States or elsewhere, but it provides an amusing diversion in family circles.

The cards are dealt out in the usual way for a ' Goulash ', and then the dealer hands four of his cards to fourth in hand and receives four in return. The dealer's partner and second in hand act in like manner. The dealer than gives four of his cards to second in hand in return for four cards, and the dealer's partner exchanges four with fourth in hand.

Partners then exchange four cards each, and the bidding starts. Obviously you give your opponents your most valueless cards, and they give you theirs. When it comes to the exchange between partners a certain amount of skill is involved.

In a sense, it is something like picquet. If you have a bad hand, you should give your partner your four best cards. If your hand is good you should give him four cards of no value, being careful to leave yourself chicane in as many suits as possible. If, however, you give an Ace you should keep one of the suit in your own hand so that you can get your partner in. The whole thing is a complete rag. It isn't Bridge.

There was recently an amusing incident at a private party which I attended. I explained the ' Philadelphia ', and an old lady expressed herself delighted with it. Towards the end of the evening I cut her as partner and we had a ' Philadelphia '. She bid ' One no trumps ' and was doubled on her left. The doubler's partner bid ' Two hearts ' and she then went ' Two no trumps '. This was doubled on her left. The doubler's partner bid ' Three clubs '. The old lady then bid ' Three no trumps ' This was again doubled and she re-doubled. The doubler on her left proceeded to lead out eleven winning spades. My revered partner had a certain game in no trumps provided I held the Ace of spades. In a previous ' Philadelphia ' she had given her partner the Ace of spades and she was under the impression she had given me that card this time. In the circumstances, why she bid originally only ' One on trumps ' is not clear. We did not go into it ! On the eleventh trick she discarded the wrong Ace and lost a grand slam. We were vulnerable. The total loss was 6,800 !

A variation of the Philadelphia, which has recently become popular at family Bridge in the United States, is, less complicated. Only partners exchange cards. First three each, then two, and finally one. The conventional

way of showing your partner what suit you want him to give you is to give him in the first exchange two cards of one suit and one of another. This latter is the suit you want. He hands it back to you, together with another on the second exchange. Finally, on the third, he gives you one more of this suit, if he has one.

I wonder if any one can suggest an alternative to the word ' vulnerable ' ? It is very cumbrous. Think too of ' vulnerability ' ! ' Invulnerable ' and even ' unvulnerable ' have been used. In a recent game my partner warned me of our position by saying : ' Now we are in the abattoir.' I suppose he meant we were liable to be cut up !

' Yours vulnerably ' is a suitable way to sign oneself to any one who wants to borrow money. At Plafond, ' In the danger zone ' is the expression used, but this is even more cumbrous than ' vulnerable '.

CHAPTER XVII

CONTRACT AND AUCTION COMPARED

HOW TO BID

BEGINNERS at Contract must start by getting a firm grasp of the scoring. Here it is:

Trick Values.—No trumps, 35; Spades, 30; Hearts, 30; Diamonds, 20; Clubs, 20. Doubling doubles trick values. Re-doubling multiplies them by four.

Game.—A game is won when one side makes a contract score of 100 or more points.

'Vulnerable'.—After a side wins one game it becomes 'Vulnerable'. Until a side wins a game it is 'Not Vulnerable'.

Premiums.—All premiums are scored 'above the line' and are classified as follows:

Honours:

In any suit call, 4 in one hand	100
In any suit call, 5 in one hand	150
In 'No trump', 4 Aces in one hand	150
All other	Nil

For Winning Final Game of Rubber:

If a two-game rubber	700
If a three-game rubber	500

Making Contract:

If undoubled	Nil
If doubled (when declarer is vulnerable)	100
If doubled (when declarer is not vulnerable)	50

Extra Tricks :

If undoubled (when declarer is vulnerable or not vulnerable), per trick	50
If doubled (when declarer is not vulnerable), per trick	100
If doubled (when declarer is vulnerable), per trick	200

Slams Bid and Made :

Little slam (when declarer is not vulnerable)	500
Little slam (when declarer is vulnerable)	750
Grand slam (when declarer is not vulnerable)	1,000
Grand slam (when declarer is vulnerable)	1,500
Unbid slams made	Nil

Slam premiums are additional to all other premiums. Doubling and re-doubling do not alter slam premiums.

Penalties :

Under-tricks (scored by adversaries ' above the line '):

If undoubled (when declarer is not vulnerable), per trick	50
If undoubled (when declarer is vulnerable) :	
For first trick	100
For subsequent tricks, per trick	200
If doubled (when declarer is not vulnerable) :	
For first two tricks, per trick	100
For third and fourth tricks, per trick	200
For subsequent tricks, per trick	400
If doubled (when declarer is vulnerable) :	
For the first trick	200
For subsequent tricks, per trick	400

Re-doubling doubles the doubled premiums and penalties.

As regards law, the Portland laws of Auction Bridge apply with the exception of one or two which are to be

suitably amended. The only important amendments can be tabulated as follows :

Scoring.—Altered as already shown.

Bidding.—Majority calling compulsory.

Revoke.—For the first revoke on the part of either the declarer or his opponents two tricks may be taken from the revoking side, or, alternatively, 250 points. Partners can elect which course to adopt after consultation. For each subsequent revoke the penalty is 250 points.

This is the same as at Auction, except that the figure 250 is substituted for the figure 100. A further change is that either side may elect to take two tricks from their opponents for a first revoke. At Auction only the declarer has this option.

At neither Contract nor Auction may this option be exercised by a side which has itself already revoked.

In such a case, there is only one penalty for each revoke ; 100 points at Auction and 250 at Contract.

Insufficient Bids.—At Auction, if the offender is called upon to bid the requisite number of tricks, his partner may not bid unless one of the adversaries bids again or doubles. At Contract, this rule applies even when the inadequate bid has been allowed to stand.

The main feature of the game is that no score can be made below the line for tricks made in excess of the declared contract.

Thus, you cannot make game unless you bid it. If at love score, the final declaration is ' Three hearts ' and you make four by cards, you score only 90 below the line (30 a trick). Your ' extra ' trick counts 50 above the line, as will be seen from the above table.

On the result, you have under-called. The question immediately arises whether you or your partner should not

have bid game by calling ' Four hearts '. On the other hand, had you done so and failed, you have missed a useful score of 90 below the line, and your adversaries score a penalty above the line.

Obviously you should bid game when you think you can get it. On the other hand, you should not risk too much. As we shall see later, it may be of great advantage to be something up below the line.

In the example I have given you become 90 up, and therefore only want 10 more for game. Thus a bid of ' One ' in any suit or in no trumps will give you game next time. The adversaries of course will not allow you to play the hand in so cheap a contract if they can help it. But in their attempt to stop you they may over-call and you may then be able to punish them heavily by doubling.

On each hand, however, the major object (apart from slams), as at Auction, is to make game.

A smaller contract towards game is a secondary consideration ; but, as I have shown, it is not to be despised. Two by cards in hearts (60 below the line) is better than two ' down ' (possibly 600 to the opponents) on a four-hearts' contract.

The vulnerable feature is novel. When a side are one game up they must no longer make a wild dash for rubber, because failure will cost them dear.

Points should be about one-third of those normally played for at Auction.

The above statement gives in concise form all information necessary to enable beginners to start a rubber.

Players in this country can go ahead under English auspices. It is quite unnecessary to acquire knowledge of the American laws or to play under their code.

We must now go further.

ORIGINAL BIDS

The whole difference between the two games is, of

course, in the bidding. As a first principle, the beginner should realize that bidding throughout should be on more conservative lines than at Auction. When you bid at Auction you expect to get your contract and you hope to go game. But unless your adversaries are bidding up against you, there is normally no necessity for risking a high bid. At Contract your hope of game involves your taking the risk of bidding it. Thus when you make a bid you practically invite your partner to bid up over it. There is therefore great danger if you bid on inadequate strength.

The big difference between the two games will be found in pre-emptive bidding. At Auction you pre-empt only in exceptional circumstances. At Contract it is essential to pre-empt whenever you have a good hand. It follows that when you make an original bid which is not pre-emptive you are disclosing only minimum strength. If you bid ' One heart ' your partner's first reflection should be that you did not bid ' Two ' or ' Three '. This fact enables you to bid originally on very little more strength than you would at Auction.

The original bid is equally important at both games. Beginners are apt to be frightened by the large penalties which can be inflicted, and they fear that if they once open their mouths their partners will go all out for game. They therefore refrain from making an original bid on anything but great strength. This is wrong. The player who consistently passes when he has certain tricks in his hand is bound to lose at Contract as well as at Auction. He does not give the partnership a fair chance of arriving at the best final bid. Above all, he is playing into the hands of his opponents. His partner assumes he has nothing and the adversaries may get away with a small contract.

The differences in bidding between Contract and Auction are least marked in the case of original bids. The absolute minimum strength for first or second in hand to bid on at Auction is four cards of a suit headed by Ace, King, and nothing else of value in the hand.

This bid is not recommended as desirable in itself, but rather as the lesser of two evils. Experience has shown that on this hand it is worse to pass than to bid. This applies equally in the first, in the second, and in rubber game.

At Contract, however, this, together with all other bidding questions, is governed by the feature which, for want of a better word, is known as vulnerability. There are four distinct situations :

When the adversaries are vulnerable and your side is not, that is to say, when they are a game up and you are not, an original bid may be made on the minimum strength permissible at Auction.

At both games the odds against your side winning the rubber in this situation are three to one ; but whereas at Auction the penalties for failure are the same for both sides, at Contract the non-vulnerable side has a strategic advantage.

If it comes to a question, on either side, of saving game, you stand to lose much less than your opponents. One trick ' down ' (doubled) will cost you 100. It will cost them 200. Two tricks ' down ' will be 200 as against 600. Three tricks ' down ' will be 400 as against 1,000. Four tricks ' down ' will be 600 as against 1,400.

Therefore, notwithstanding your disadvantage as regards the rubber, if a game bidding or game saving fight begins in the second game, the odds as regards that particular hand are heavily on you. You can afford to take greater risks than your opponents. It follows that if possible, you should start by attacking.

Your main object at Contract, as at Auction, is to get game, whether it is the first, second, or rubber game. Your secondary object is to save game. At Contract, as I have now shown, when you are not vulnerable, you are in a much more favourable position to achieve your secondary object than at Auction. You should take advantage of this from the start.

Your original bid may serve to enable your side to bid up for game. Alternatively, it may prevent the adversaries from bidding up for game. It may have considerable moral effect. If the worst occurs and they bid game, then your original bid may make just the difference between success and failure, because, if it is your partner's opening, he has a safe ' blind ' lead.

Every bid at Bridge is a question of odds. When, therefore, your adversaries are vulnerable and you are not, the odds in the next hand, considered by itself, are in your favour, and you should be as aggressive as possible.

The other side will be all out to get game, which will mean rubber points of 700 to them. If you start by making a bid, and look round wanting to know what they are going to do about it, you have done what you can to establish ' a funk '.

They stand to lose heavily by over-calling, and you put them on their guard at once. If you pass weakly, they are much more likely to get into a game going bid. As in war and other spheres of activity, attack is often the best means of defence.

A very different situation arises when your side is vulnerable and the other side is not. Here the position is reversed, and it is unwise to start an attack on minimum strength. In this case, to bid ' One club ' on Ace, King, to four, and nothing else of value, or ' One no trumps ' on three ' bare ' Aces, would be folly.

Any original bid you make when you are vulnerable induces your partner to believe that you are strong. If he has anything of value, it is his duty to raise the Contract. There is a vital difference here between Auction and Contract. At Auction you often get the chance of passing after making a bid, thereby showing that you are not strong, but at Contract that chance may never arise.

Thus, suppose at love score you bid ' One no trumps ' at Auction on minimum strength, and second in hand passes. Your partner has good support. He passes. Fourth in

hand bids over you, and you then pass. You have made your effort and you show that you have nothing more to say.

At Contract, however, this situation cannot arise, because if your partner has good support he does not pass. He bids possibly ' Two no trumps ' or ' Three '. The fact that you bid originally when vulnerable in the second game is a definite inducement to him to bid up for game.

This may be just what your adversaries are waiting for. It is in this way that 1,400, 1,800, and so on are lost above the line. Therefore, when vulnerable in the second game, you should not bid originally unless you have strength considerably in excess of the quasi-informative bid permissible at Auction.

There is the further situation when both sides are vulnerable—that is, in rubber game.

Here it is touch and go whether you should bid on minimum strength or not. The advantage may be great but the possible penalty severe. It is not the original bid itself which matters so much as what it may lead to. It is difficult to give advice without consideration of the psychological factor. Thus, if your partner is ' enterprising ', when you are in doubt pass. If he is backward, put up a bid if you can.

If your adversaries are the go-ahead sort it may be wise to keep silent and see how far they will dare to go.

This position bristles with difficulties. I doubt if it is possible for any one to put in writing what should be done in the various circumstances which can arise.

When neither side is vulnerable do not bid on minimum strength. Go steady at the start.

Let me deal with this very important question in another way.

An original non-pre-emptive bid at Contract means very nearly what it would mean at Auction. Whether your side has already a score below the line or the opponents have, or whether you both have ; whether you are vulnerable or your opponents are, or you both are, or neither of

you are—the original bid has a similar meaning at both games.

There is only one way in which this must be qualified. The absolute minimum original suit bid at Auction—that is, Ace, King, x, x of any suit, and nothing else of value—is normally not quite good enough at Contract. When neither side is a game up you should have something else of value, even if it is only Queen, Knave, x of another suit.

When you are vulnerable your hand should be slightly stronger than this. This applies whether your opponents are vulnerable or not.

When your opponents are vulnerable and you are not you may bid originally, exactly as you would at Auction. Perhaps this last advice is unwise for the beginner, particularly if he is playing with a partner who is new to the game.

The player, however, who can rely on his partner's judgement should, in such circumstances, make an original bid on minimum strength.

Do not forget that neither your opponents nor your partner can know that you have bid on minimum strength. Aggression is all in favour of your side.

The attitude of your opponents must necessarily differ from that of your partner. Let us look into the minds of your three companions at the table. Your partner should realize that you may be merely putting up a fight.

Until you have a chance to speak again, he should decide to go steady. He will, in fact, put you with a minimum bid. Can your opponents treat you in the same way? They can not, and therein lies your advantage.

As I have said, you and your partner stand to lose much less by over-calling than do your adversaries. The latter know that, but they cannot be certain that you are not, in fact, over-calling.

They have a strong incentive to bid up for game and rubber, whereas you and your partner may be going for penalties. If you have a reasonable chance for game, you should of course go for it.

But, as I have said, before the deal the odds against your winning the rubber are three to one. To go game is of far greater value to your opponents than it is to you.

To some extent, therefore, they are out for game and you are out for penalties. As they are vulnerable, these may be heavy. In these circumstances it is difficult for your adversaries to know what your original bid means.

You may be trying to frighten them or you may have quite a good hand. If your partner gets 'excited' your loss may be comparatively small, and you save the game. But if your adversaries ignore you and assume you are bluffing, they may find that you are not, and in that case they may incur heavy loss.

The vulnerable feature at Contract provides one of the chief interests of the game. Penalties for failure are so high that against some players it may be almost an advantage to lose the first game.

In the second game, your hand may be of four different types:

(1) You may have nothing.

(2) You may have what would be a minimum bid at Auction.

(3) You may have a good all-round hand on which you cannot expect game unless your partner bids. At this stage of the game he will bid if he can. If he does not, you are fairly confident of being able to defeat any game call by your opponents.

(4) You may have a big hand, on which you expect game for your side.

If you have hand No. 1, you pass, but your adversaries do not know that it is not hand No. 3, on which, in the circumstances, you might also decide to pass.

If you have hand No. 2, you make an original bid, but again your adversaries do not know that it is not hand No. 3 on which you had decided not to pass.

Thus at Contract, whether you pass or make a bid, you keep the other side guessing. The advantage, however, of

making a bid when you can is great, particularly when you fear your opponents may go game.

Let me give some examples of minimum suit bids—bids which cannot be described as compulsory but merely permissible. When first or second in hand, at Auction: Clubs—Ace, King, x, x, and nothing else of value. 'One club.'

At Contract, when not vulnerable: Clubs—Ace, King, x, x; Diamonds—Queen, Knave, 10, 4; and nothing else of value. 'One club.'

At Contract, when vulnerable: Clubs—Ace, King, x, x; Diamonds—King, Queen, 10, and nothing else of value. 'One club.'

It must be clearly understood that once you have made any one of these calls you must for ever afterwards be silent, no matter what your partner bids. An intelligent partner will understand from your subsequent passes that you have bid on minimum strength. If he under-calls, hoping that you will put him up, that is not your fault. He cannot possibly expect you to hold less than you actually have.

I again insist, however, on the fact that if your opponents have strength your bid may be advantageous in two ways: it may prevent them bidding a game which they could get, because they cannot know you have bid on minimum strength; and it may be of great value if your partner has the lead, because he knows what suit to start with safety. There are myriads of rubbers lost through the fortuitous circumstance of a blind opening lead.

Most American writers demand greater strength for opening bids than the examples I have given. Both in America and on the Continent bidding at every form of Bridge has always been more conservative than in first-class circles in this country.

I am strongly of opinion that on this question we are right, but 'class' enters largely into the matter. With a poor player as one's partner it would be folly to bid on the

hands I have given; but with a good partner no harm can arise.

A pass may make all the difference between winning and losing the rubber. You should not lose by such bidding, and you may gain.

Later on we will discuss the pre-emptive bid at Contract, and we shall see what a vital part it plays in this game. It shows strength and is an invitation to the partnership to bid up for game. Need I say more? Surely it follows that if you do not pre-empt you are merely announcing the possibility of a small contract, or frightening the opponents, or, at the worst, showing a safe lead.

Similar principles apply to an original bid of 'One no trumps'. As I have said, minimum strength for Auction is not quite good enough at Contract. It is better to pass than risk a heavy penalty due to your partner assuming your hand is better than it is. The risk is greatly increased when you are vulnerable, but it may be bad enough if you are not.

How often a player makes a light 'No trumper' at Auction, and, though receiving some support in his partner's hand, gets only five tricks. He goes down 100 only and may have saved game. At Contract, if the same 'No trumper' is bid and the partner is 'enterprising', the contract may be put up to 'Three no trumps', which will probably be doubled. If not vulnerable, the 'No trumps' bidder will go down 600, and if vulnerable, 1,400. Again, I am not advocating under-calling, but advising reasonable caution. Before you bid an original 'One no trumps' at Contract satisfy yourself that your hand is stronger than the minimum which would justify such a bid at Auction.

'RAISING' YOUR PARTNER

A bid at Contract has an entirely different significance according to whether it is an original bid, a pre-emptive bid (original or not), a bid made over a partner's bid, a bid

made over an adverse bid, or a bid (other than original) made when either side are something up below the line.

In connexion with ' raising ', that is, a bid made over a partner's bid (it is called in America ' jumping '), paradoxically it is more important to consider what your partner has not bid rather than what he has.

For example, if he bids ' One heart ' your first reflection should be that he did not bid ' Two ' or ' Three '. He failed to pre-empt and is therefore not anticipating game. You know that he has sufficient strength to make an opening bid, and that is all.

If you have a big hand, with some support in hearts, you bid ' Four hearts '.

If you have a big hand with no support in hearts you should pre-empt in your own suit or bid ' Three no trumps '. If your hand is good without being quite big enough for game on your own you should bid one short of game either in no trumps or in your own suit or in hearts.

In this case you leave the decision to your partner. If his original bid was made on something more than minimum strength he is given the opportunity of bidding game. If not, he will leave you in.

If you have merely average strength there is no object in bidding over your partner. From the fact that he did not pre-empt you know that he has not many cards of value. You should therefore pass.

It may, of course, be useful to get (say) 60 below the line rather than 30, but normally it is better in such cases to keep the contract low and be satisfied to score 50 above the line for any over-tricks you can make.

The risk of failure to get two by cards may not be great, but there is considerable danger that your encouragement may induce your partner to go on bidding.

It can hardly be necessary to add that if you have a poor hand you should not bid.

The advice I am giving here is in respect of hands on which the opponents do not bid, and when you have no

score below the line. If you are something up, or your opponents bid, the significance of your calls is altered materially. As we shall see later, your non-pre-emptive bids in that case follow the principles of Auction rather than those of Contract.

RESCUING

Many Auction players still favour 'rescue' bids; particularly the take-out of a partner's 'One no trumps' call. Some go so far as to bid 'Two spades' over 'One no trumps' on a trickless hand containing five small spades. This is an extreme case; but there is no difference in principle between the take-out of a 'No trumper' on five small cards and a take-out on five to the Queen, Knave or five to the King. All are 'rescue' bids and are quite indefensible. Rescuing at any time is a hazardous proceeding. It will usually be found that when the Contract gets big it is better to leave your partner in his call which has been doubled than to switch to some suit, which you could not bid before. If you have already bid it, you should generally leave it to your partner to switch back to it if he wishes to do so. Myriads of points have been lost by this folly of taking a partner out solely because he is doubled.

If you are a rescue maniac, and your opponents know it, they will often double in order to get you to take out your partner's perfectly genuine game-winning call.

It follows from these observations that to 'rescue' a man who is not in trouble—to bid on a trickless hand solely because your partner has bid 'No trumps'—is the height of folly.

I was always a fairly good swimmer, and all my life I have delighted in sea-bathing. One day I was turning somersaults in a choppy sea when another bather thought I was in difficulties. Pluckily he swam out to help, and then found that he could not get back. I was rather out of breath myself, but I managed to help him.

It was not easy. In the struggle both of us might have been drowned. I take off my hat to my bathing friend. He was a poor swimmer, and he showed the greatest possible pluck and self-sacrifice. But he made a mistake.

This little story provides a moral for Auction Bridge players. It is foolish to endanger yourself and others in an attempt to rescue those who are not in trouble. Thank goodness, Bridge mistakes do not matter in any serious sense, but we all want to do our best at the game. At Bridge there are players who are always trying to rescue their partners from some imaginary difficulty. There is no sense in it; still less is there any heroism. It is simply stupid.

If I bid 'One no trumps' and second in hand passes, my partner should not bid unless he sees a good chance of getting his Contract and has reasonable hope of game. If he has no tricks, his proper course is to pass. I am all in favour of forward bidding in the hope of game; and enterprise in attempts to save game. But this rescue business is sheer madness.

When I bid 'One no trumps' I may or may not be a bit out of breath, but I am certainly not in serious trouble. Presumably I can make four tricks, which means that at the worst I am only 150 down. If the bid is left in, I have done well to save the game at that cost. The adversaries make nine tricks, but instead of going game they get a comparatively small score above the line.

Obviously there are many hands on which the loss in a suit call would have been less. This is the argument of the rescue bidders. Their attitude of mind is all wrong. They are delighted if any particular result shows that the suit bid would have cost only 100 as against 150 of the no trumper. There are, however, hands on which the result would have been the other way about.

The fact that one can argue either way leaves me cold. I hate discussing loss at all. The Bridge player should be out to win. The man who bids 'One no trumps' is at

least trying to win. He has the right spirit. The man who takes him out on rubbish is trying to lose. It is true that he hopes to lose less, but the mere fact of making a losing call (except to save game against adverse bidding) creates the wrong atmosphere.

A more important reason for condemning rescue bids is that in the long run they fail even in their own miserable objective. When there is weakness about, a bid of ' One no trumps ' is far more likely to hold the field than a take-out of ' Two hearts ' or ' Two spades '. Either of the latter calls may induce bidding by the adversaries, with game as a result. Alternatively, the take-out may be doubled. Then the partnership will be in real difficulty. The man who bid ' One no trumps ' may be forced to bid ' Two '. This may be doubled, and although his partner has volunteered a bid he will find a dummy with no tricks in it.

I wonder what ' class ' of Bridge is played by those who advocate the weakness take-out. They cannot have much respect for their opponents. I should like to have the luck always to sit on their left at high points. Now and again they would save 50 or 100 points, but, my goodness me, what they would lose in a year ! Their partners, too, must be at a disadvantage, for no good player can make an aggressive ' One no trumps ' bid, knowing that if his partner is trickless the contract will be raised to two of a suit.

To bid ' Two spades ' on Queen, Knave, to five or King to five with nothing else of value in the hand, is an outrage at any stage of the game and in any circumstances. The fact that your partner has bid ' One no trumps ' is no sort of reason for making a thoroughly bad bid. If he gets into trouble it is not your fault. If he is doubled, you may try to rescue him ; but, even then, when you have no tricks in your hand it is usually best to leave him alone. If he is doubled, the sea may appear to have become rough, but it is more than likely that the partner of the doubler will do the rescuing by taking him out. A ' No trumps '

bid, then, should only be taken out on a hand which fulfils two conditions: (*a*) High probability that Contract will be obtained, and (*b*) better chance for game in the take-out than in 'No trumps'.

Even though your partner has a 'No trumps' hand, there is no high probability that a bid of 'Two hearts' on five to the King will succeed. You are gambling on your partner having strength in that particular suit. If he has, well and good; but in that case your hand will probably provide tricks if played in 'No trumps'. If he has not, then your bid has opened up a whole field of doubling and switching and other trouble.

A minor suit take-out may often fulfil condition (*a*), but at love score it can seldom provide the best chance for game. If at Auction you have a probable game in diamonds or clubs, you should bid four or five. At love score, there is no such thing as a bid of 'Two diamonds' or 'Two clubs' over a partner's 'One no trumps'; it is a rescue bid, and therefore a bad bid. If you have hearts—Ace, Queen, Knave, x, x—there is good probability of getting two by cards in hearts and a better chance for game in hearts than in 'No trumps'. You should therefore bid 'Two hearts' over your partner's 'One no trumps'. If, however, your suit, as above, is in diamonds, the second condition is not fulfilled. You have every hope of getting 'Two diamonds', but the better chance for game is in 'No trumps'. You should therefore pass.

These remarks with regard to Auction apply fully to Contract. Indeed, they are even more applicable. Every time you bid at Contract you hope to be raised. If therefore you bid on weakness, you deserve all you will get.

Not every bid made at Contract, however, is a 'come on' call to your partner. It depends on the circumstances in which it is made. But it is always a sign of strength, however meagre. Any bid made directly over a partner's bid shows definite strength in the hand. The only way of showing weakness is to pass.

If, at love score, your partner bids ' One heart ' and second in hand passes, your bid of ' One spade ' is not a ' come on ' call, otherwise you would have bid at least ' Two spades '. It shows, however, that you cannot support the heart call. But even if you are chicane in hearts, you should not bid ' One spade ' without reasonably good strength.

BIDDING OVER OPPONENTS

Auction Bridge players who take up Contract often fail to realize that correct inferences cannot be drawn unless the fullest weight is given to the circumstances in which bids are made.

We all know that at Auction we must bid to the score, and that, to a certain extent ' flag-flying ', particularly in rubber game, is permissible. An intelligent partner will always take into consideration the possibility that your bid is an attempt to save game.

There are usually factors which enable him to sense the true state of affairs. You may have passed originally, or you may have failed to support him at the first opportunity.

The adversaries may be something ' up ', and their bidding suggests that it is a hopeless case unless one of you puts up a fight.

If your partner is wise he will judge the situation. It is on such occasions as these that the real interest of bidding arises. It is here that skill tells. If you are lucky enough to be a good card holder you will win consistently, but you may fail when you find yourself ' on the collar '.

The unlucky player has often to take great risks to save game, and the question as to how far he dare go in this direction calls for judgement and card sense of a high order. The lucky player can look after himself. He can afford to let the game go and to await the next deal or rubber.

My advice is addressed mainly to the average card holder

and the unlucky player. Continually they have difficult situations to deal with, and it is with their worries that I am mostly concerned.

What I have said about circumstances affecting the bidding at Auction applies with even greater force at Contract.

There is, of course, the question of vulnerability on either side, but there is much more in it than this.

I have said that your partner's bid has an entirely different significance according to whether it is an original bid, a bid made over you, a bid made over an adverse bid, or a bid made when either you or the opponents are something up below the line.

I have already dealt with the original bid and the bid made over the partner's bid. Let us therefore now consider the bid made over an adverse bid.

Let us assume that at love score Z the dealer bids ' One heart ' and that A, second in hand, bids ' One spade '. Y, the dealer's partner, bids ' Two hearts '. Has this bid the same significance as if it had been made in the absence of a bid by A ? Certainly not.

It is not a ' come on ' call for game in hearts. It merely shows that there is something of value in the hand, and that it is not void or very short in hearts. It is, indeed, to some extent a sign of weakness, for if the hand were strong ' Three ' or ' Four hearts ' would have been bid.

It means that there is some chance of getting two by cards in hearts, or that the bid is made in order to prevent the adversaries from getting the odd trick in spades. Alternatively, Y may be frightened of the spade suit, and may fear that the opponents will bid up for game in spades.

He therefore bids in the hope that the announcement of some strength in his hand, combined with his partner's original display of strength, will deter them from bidding high enough for game.

One thing should be clear. Y is not bidding up for game

himself, nor is he doing the next best thing, that is, waiting for his opponents to get themselves into trouble.

Z may therefore assume that Y has minor support, with no sure hope of defeating an adverse bid of ' Four spades '.

There is a vital difference here between Contract and Auction. At Contract, if Y says ' No bid ', he may be much stronger than if he says ' Two hearts '.

He may have the sort of hand on which, while game in hearts is improbable, any attempt by the adversaries to get game in spades can be severely dealt with.

If he has that kind of hand he passes, in the hope that his silence will convey the impression that he is weak. B may have support in spades and may bid ' Three '. In that case, Z, finding no support from his partner, must pass, and then A may risk a chance for game by bidding ' Four spades '.

It will then be Y's turn to speak again, and he can spring a surprise by doubling.

At Auction you must bid if you want your adversaries to get into a high contract. At Contract the best way to induce them to do so is to lie low and say nothing.

I regard due understanding of bids made over adverse bids as so important that I propose to pursue the matter, even though I become involved in some repetition.

I again insist on the distinction between a jump over the partner's bid and a raise when one of the adversaries has made an intervening bid.

The difference is vital. Until it has been fully grasped no Contract player can hope to succeed at the game. In order to explain it I repeat in concise form what I have said about the direct raise.

At love score your partner deals and bids ' Two spades '. Second in hand passes. You bid ' Three spades '. What does it mean ?

Merely that while you feel unable to ' go nap ' yourself, you have reasonably good support for the spade call, and you hope that your announcement of the fact may enable your partner to bid game.

It is an encouragement to him to do something which you feel you cannot quite do yourself. If he has a hand on which he himself nearly bid ' Three spades ', his course is clear. If, on the other hand, he has a dubious ' Two spades ' bid, he will leave in your bid of ' Three '.

But supposing second in hand bids ' Three hearts ' over your partner's ' Two spades ', what does your bid of ' Three spades ' then mean ? In the first place, as in the former case, you are clearly not strong enough to bid ' Four '. In other words, you do not anticipate game in spades. Secondly, you are obviously afraid the opponents may go game in hearts.

Your announcement of some strength, combined with the good strength disclosed by your partner, may prevent them from bidding ' Four hearts '. If unable to bid game yourself, you think you can defeat an adverse ' Four hearts ' contract your obvious course is to pass.

In that case you may deceive the opponents into believing you have nothing. They may go ahead for game in hearts, and you can then double.

If, therefore, you neither pass nor bid game in spades yourself, it should be clear that you do not like the idea of playing the hand against a game going bid in hearts. You are merely putting up a fight.

At Auction one has often to bid in an endeavour to prevent the adversaries playing the hand in a declaration on which they *may* go game.

At Contract the main line of defence is often an endeavour, by display of strength, to prevent game being bid. Anything may happen in the play of a hand. The only certain way of saving game is to be successful in inducing opponents to fail to bid it.

In advising any course of action it is customary among writers to stress the effect it may have on the partner. In the example I have given above I have myself followed this course.

I have made it clear that the man who originally bid

'Two spades' should be able to read exactly what his partner means when he bids 'Three' over an adverse bid of 'Three hearts'. The reader is fully entitled to suggest that as one of the objects of the bidder may be to frighten the opponents, the latter will be aware of the fact.

The bid of 'Three spades' will indeed be an inducement to the other side to go on with their hearts. It shows them clearly that there is no question of 'the silent trap'. They will, in fact, read this bid in the same way as the partner will read it.

This is perfectly true, but, even so, it is not an argument against the principle of correct bidding. Skill at Bridge consists in doing the right thing. A player can only hope that his partner will understand, and that his opponents will not. In any case, it is essential that the beginner should know what is the right thing to do.

When he becomes a first-class player and is playing with three other first-class players he will vary his methods. It will often pay him to confuse his partner as well as his opponents. But at first the thing to do is to stick to principle. It is the only way.

THE SILENT TRAP

Elsewhere I have pointed out that the element of bluff, so dear to the Auction Bridge player is almost entirely eliminated at Contract. That is true, but only in a general sense and in so far as it applies to active bidding. At Auction, one can often get opponents into trouble by bidding up oneself. They will go on to keep you out.

At Contract they may get into trouble themselves if you say nothing. The first thing for the novice to learn is that because his opponents pass it does not follow they have nothing. This applies particularly when you are vulnerable and they are not.

Supposing you are a game up at Auction and at love score you bid 'One no trumps' and all pass. You have

some reason to suppose you have a chance for game because your opponents are apparently too weak to put up a fight. Fourth in hand cannot even call to show a lead.

At Contract you bid the same ' One no trumps ' and your partner, having some support, bids ' Two '. You now have to consider whether you will bid ' Three ' for game. When this situation arises, do not for one moment imagine that your opponents have nothing because they have not bid. They may be bluffing with their ' No bids ', waiting for you to get yourself into trouble.

I have often seen a look of pained surprise on the face of the player who has gone to ' Three no trumps ' only to find himself promptly doubled and heavily down. Recently my right-hand adversary bid in this way and was 1,400 down. In apologizing to his partner he showed complete ignorance by saying : ' They both passed ; I thought it was all right.'

Let us now look at it the other way round. Your opponents have the deal and are vulnerable. The opening bid against you is ' One no trumps ', and you have a good all-round hand. Against a declared no trumper you have very little chance of going game yourself. This is the time to pass in the hope that your adversaries will bid up for game.

It is true that on some hands you might get two by cards in a suit call, and that might be of great value. But you may miss it and go down, and you have lost your chance of a good score above the line because you have warned your opponents that you have a good hand.

The chances of their bidding up for game when you have announced strength are greatly diminished. In this connexion there is just one element of bluff which may on occasion be practised. It is when you think you have no chance of defeating a game Contract and you bid in the hope that your opponents, thinking you have strength, will refrain from bidding game.

This comes off sometimes, but it is dangerous because

your partner may think you are hoping for game yourself and may put you up with disastrous consequences.

It will be seen that card sense of a high order is required at Contract. It is not possible to lay down many hard-and-fast rules. Often you must play by ' the light of Nature '.

When you have decided to employ ' the silent trap ' you may sometimes get an opportunity to change your tactics, when it is clear that they are of no avail. For example, if at love score Z bids ' Two spades ' and you, A, have a good hand, with strength in diamonds, but do not see reasonable hope of game, you pass, hoping that your adversaries may bid up for game, which you can defeat.

Over Z's ' Two spades ' Y (his partner) bids ' Three clubs ' and Z then passes. It is now clear that your opponents have decided not to go for game. If you pass, the hand will be played in ' Three clubs '. Accordingly you now bid ' Three diamonds '. If your partner understands the game he will leave you in. It should be clear to him that you have made no signal for game in diamonds. You hope to get three by cards and no more. You did not speak at first because, originally, the better plan appeared to be to give the adversaries every opportunity to get themselves into difficulties.

DOUBLING AT CONTRACT

At Contract there is very little scope for doubles which are not ' free '. I have said that if your opponents are bidding up and you have a good hand, normally your wisest course is to remain silent until they get into a game going bid. You may be able to double a bid of ' Three spades ', but if there is no score below the line, often your best course is to wait.

At Auction, if you pass, the hand will be played in ' Three spades ' undoubled, but at Contract there is every chance that the bid will be raised to ' Four spades '. There is obviously chance of greater profit in doubling ' four ' than

' three ' ; moreover, in doubling ' four ' you are taking no risks of ' doubling them out '. Of course, if you are the last to speak and it is therefore clear that ' three ' is the maximum bid you can hope for against you, you double on exactly the same lines as at Auction.

Re-doubling comes into its own at Contract. At Auction the man who re-doubles seriously has first to be certain that he is going to get more out of a switch back by the opponents into the suit they have been calling against him. This is very unlikely. Such a position can seldom arise. A re-double at Auction is usually a bluff on the part of the player who knows he cannot make his call. At Contract it nearly always means business.

The high Contract which has been doubled has often been arrived at without any calling on the part of the opponents. When they have said nothing throughout it is obvious they cannot suddenly put up a big call by way of a switch over the re-double. The re-doubler is therefore usually safe from switches. The man who doubled will simply have to ' stick it '.

So called ' informatory ' doubles are equally applicable at Contract as at Auction. At the former game, however, it is even more obvious, without prior arrangement, whether or not a double should be taken out. If at Contract Z bids ' Two spades ', obviously hoping that his partner Y will put him up to ' Four ', and A, second in hand, doubles, it should be abundantly clear to B, A's partner, that it will not pay them to play the hand in ' Two spades doubled '. If A liked the spade bid, he would probably have passed in the hope of hearing it raised to ' Three ' or ' Four '.

Apart from this consideration, it must be obvious that a player who bids ' Two spades ' originally at Contract is not going to lose much if he is left in.

If his opponents are so strong that they are certain that he will lose anything at all, then they are presumably throwing away game for the sake of a small penalty.

Here is a short object-lesson for those who are unable to

play cards without attaching highly technical meanings to very ordinary phrases.

I am told that there is some distinction between the words ' informatory ', ' informative ', and ' negative ', but I have not been able to find out what it is.

Contract players often fail to realize that at love score the double of ' One no trumps ' or ' one ' in a major suit or ' two ' in a minor suit is, in a sense, ' free '.

If the partner of the doubler has a worthless hand, it will often pay him to leave the double in. This applies particularly when you are vulnerable and your opponents are not.

With a trickless hand, you may get into serious trouble if you take out the double. It is true that you will probably have to pay above the line, but it will be only 50 for the Contract and 100 for each over trick.

Your advantage lies in the fact that they cannot go game. If a bid of ' One spade ' is left in, doubled, and as many as three over tricks are made, the adversaries will score 60 below and 350 above the line—total 410. Deduct the 120 they would have scored below the line had they bid ' Four spades ' and it will be seen that game has been saved at a cost of 290, which at Auction is the equivalent of about 100 points. Thus, there is a big difference here between Contract and Auction. At the latter game, the worse your hand the more essential it is to take out a low Contract which has been doubled by your partner.

At Contract, the double will probably be taken out by your adversaries. If you pass, the original bidder may redouble, thereby ensuring game.

It will then be up to your partner (the doubler) to get out of the trouble himself. It is clear, then, that when a low Contract doubled does not give game, the doubler's partner is relieved of the necessity of butting in.

PRE-EMPTIVE BIDS

If I were asked what constitutes the main difference of detail between bidding at Contract and Auction,

I should reply without hesitation: 'The pre-emptive bid.'

At Auction, bids of 'Two no trumps' or 'Three' of a suit are pre-emptive. At Contract any original bid higher than 'One', or any bid higher than is necessary to overcall a previous bid, is pre-emptive.

At Auction the object is to shut out all further calling. At Contract, on the other hand, the pre-emptive bid is a demand to the partner to support or to show any strength he has in his hand.

This distinction is vital. By pre-empting at Auction you are saying to your partner: 'Don't speak. I hope the others won't either.' At Contract you are saying: 'Speak on the slightest pretext; we can possibly bid up for game or even for a slam.'

It is thus an indication that you are strong, and is in fact the only way in which you can convey the information. If you fail to pre-empt when you have a good hand you commit the greatest possible contract crime. You should pre-empt directly it is your turn to speak. Show your strength at once. Bid as high as you possibly can. If your hand is big, bid and bid, and go on bidding.

If on a good hand, you are in the habit of bidding 'One' of a suit or 'One no trumps', give up the game. Go back to Auction.

PRE-EMPTING AT AUCTION

As I have said, at Auction the intention is to shut out calling by any other player. It means that you have strong desire to play the hand in the bid you have announced. You are endeavouring to prevent your opponents from making a bid and you are saying to your partner: 'Leave me alone; whatever you have, it will pay us to play this hand in the declaration I have made.' It is a course of action which should not be employed without full justification. Unless you have reasonable expectations of game in your call, it is unwise to shut out your partner.

Given sufficient strength, a pre-emptive bid of ' Two no trumps ' is often successful in preventing fourth in hand from bidding a suit to get it led, and if your partner has cards of value game should be assured. You may have stopped him naming a suit, but this disadvantage may be fully outweighed by the fact that you have forced silence upon your adversaries. If, on the other hand, your partner has nothing of value, he could never have called, and, therefore in this event you are shutting out only your opponents.

In the case of suit calls, bids of ' Two ' at Auction are not strictly pre-emptive bids, for the reason that they are not big enough to prevent further calling. More often than not they serve as an inducement to enterprising opponents to put up a bid. Only a bid of ' Three ' or more can therefore be described as pre-emptive. A bid of ' Three hearts ' or ' Three spades ' means that you expect to get game if you are left in. You do not want your adversaries to speak, nor even your partner.

If with this same object you pre-empt in a minor suit, you should bid at least ' Four '. To insist on playing the hand in diamonds or clubs at love score would be folly, unless you expect to get five by cards. If you do, you should bid more than ' Three '.

The higher your bid the less chance there is of your opponents speaking, and you should therefore give yourself the maximum chance of attaining your object. If you do not expect game in your suit you should not pre-empt at all. Thus, a pre-emptive bid at Auction should be at least three of a major suit, or at least four of a minor.

In either case your object is to stop all calling with a view to getting game in the suit you have bid.

PRE-EMPTING AT CONTRACT

Now let us see how pre-emptive bidding at Contract differs. It may have the effect of shutting out opponents,

but this is not its main object. As regards one's partner, it is an invitation, even a demand, for him to go on. For this reason a pre-emptive bid at Contract is any bid over 'One'. An original bid of 'One' at both Contract and Auction is 'informatory'. It is a feeler; it is tentative. It does not show great strength, but merely the possession of two or three tricks.

At Contract, when your hand is strong, it is vital to indicate the fact to your partner, and you do so by pre-empting. If you bid 'Two diamonds' or 'Two clubs', calls which at love score should never be made at Auction, you are not demanding to play the hand in the suit you have named. You are merely showing that you have a good hand, with strength in the suit called.

You are calling upon your partner to bid anything he has got, so that you may work up for a game bid. If your partner has something of value he should support you or make a bid of his own. If you bid 'Two hearts' or 'Two spades', exactly the same inference is conveyed.

At Contract there is no difference in principle between a bid of 'Two spades' and a bid of 'Two clubs'. Both these bids show a powerful hand with main strength in the suit bid. Provided your partner fully understands this, he will be able to tell from the nature of his hand whether or not there is a chance for game, and he will act accordingly.

If you bid 'Three' of a suit, or 'Two no trumps', it follows that your hand is even stronger. Your partner should put you up with only one certain trick in his hand or even with as little as two possible tricks. Over a bid of 'Three' of a suit your partner should support you if he can, even though he has chicane. From this it follows that you must not pre-empt 'Three' of a suit unless, in addition to strength, you have great length.

The player who, at love score, bids 'Three spades' is practically saying to his partner: 'Never mind about trump support; if you have one trick in your hand, I expect to go game.'

While I am dealing with this subject let me insist that players should ignore the silly slogan that a bid of ' Two ' of a suit is stronger than a bid of ' Three '. Have nothing to do with these artificial conventions. They are not played in this country and they never will be.

BIDDING TO THE SCORE

Beginners at Contract should recognize that a score towards game may be of far greater value than an equivalent score at Auction.

At both games an attempt should be made, whenever possible, to prevent opponents getting away with a cheap contract which will give them game. When this position arises, a player should be prepared to risk certain loss, provided it is not too heavy.

But in this connexion Contract differs vitally from Auction, because the penalties for over-calling are so great. A Contract player, therefore, particularly if his side is vulnerable, cannot take the same risk to save game and rubber as an Auction player.

Let us suppose that at Auction the dealer is 16 up in rubber game. He bids ' Two hearts '. Second and third in hand pass, and fourth in hand has a dubious ' Two diamonds ' bid. He bids ' Three diamonds ', is doubled, and goes down 300. This cannot be described as a very bad result, provided the ' Two hearts ' bid would have been made. There is probably a score for honours in diamonds. The other side, too, have been prevented from scoring honours in hearts. The rubber, worth 250, has been saved.

Thus the man who over-called can consider himself more or less all square on the ' deal ', but he has one considerable advantage : if he had let the other side ' go out ' he would have had to pay at once, whereas the rubber is now still alive, and he has an opportunity of winning it and getting back his loss. He may not have to pay at all. Moreover,

his action might have resulted in the opponents bidding ' Three hearts ' and failing to get it.

Let us now consider the same case at Contract. Three tricks ' down ' will cost 1,000. The rubber, however, is worth only 500. Thus, the loss in this case is twice the value of the rubber, whereas at Auction, as we have seen, it is only one and one-fifth of its value. Therefore, however the honours in the respective suits are placed, the possible loss incurred in an attempt to save game is relatively greater at Contract than at Auction.

It is clear, then, that the man who is something up may be in a very advantageous position. If he has a good hand he can bid game without undue risk, and he can, metaphorically speaking, adopt a threatening attitude towards any one who contemplates interfering with him.

Conversely, the man who is out to save game must consider carefully whether the risk is worth while. He may get away with a loss of 600 (two tricks ' down '), but, on the other hand, with an unlucky distribution of the cards, the loss may be much greater. There are such figures as 1,400, 1,800, 2,200, and so on. Recently my opponents went down 1,800 in one hand and 2,600 in the next ; total, 4,400 in two hands !

This was a case, from our point of view, of nothing succeeding like success. The 1,800 represented five tricks ' down ', the equivalent of 500 at Auction. This loss was incurred in an attempt to save game. The cards were badly distributed for my opponents. At Auction every first-class player loses 500 now and again. Any player who does not is either amazingly lucky or not first class.

The loss of 2,600 in the next hand, equivalent to 700 at Auction, was due to a wild attempt to save the rubber, which now included the figure of 1,800 above the line ; 2,600 represented over five times the value of the rubber (500), while at Auction 700 represents less than three times its value.

This incident which I have recalled is, of course, most exceptional, but it serves to show what can happen. For the purposes of my argument, I prefer to rely on the fact previously stated—that to be three tricks ' down ' in rubber game in an attempt to save the situation may pay at Auction but not at Contract.

The heaviest penalties are nearly always incurred by players who are bent on preventing opponents going game in a small contract. Thus the importance of being something up below the line will be readily seen.

If there is no score below the line, your adversaries will be content to allow you to bid up to four in a major suit or five in a minor. They may have some chance of defeating a high contract and they take no risk. But when a man is 60 up in a rubber game, and bids ' Two hearts ', it goes against the grain to let him get away with it. As Colonel Brindle would say : ' It is hard to bear.'

Among good players there is often a score to both sides below the line, particularly in rubber game.

When this position arises, the bidding follows on lines identical with Auction. For example, if Z Y are 80 up and A B are 80 up in rubber game, bidding should proceed exactly as it does at Auction. The rubber is in jeopardy, and each side stands to lose equivalent amounts in penalties.

The extent to which either side should go to save game cannot be envisaged in cold print. It depends so much on the personal factor and on psychology.

In a case such as this, as in practically all cases, the American system of ' counting ' hands goes by the board hopelessly. A lucky distribution of the cards will give you game. An unlucky distribution will mean heavy loss.

It is the same with your opponents. Both sides are ' all out '. Dare you bid one more or would it pay you to double ? Hands can be produced which will show that either way is right. And, equally, there are hands on which it is clear that the man who was theoretically right was in practice wrong.

There are situations where no amount of learning and study will help you. They have to be ' sensed '.

UNDER-CALLING AND OVER-CALLING

In dealing with under-calling and over-calling it will be necessary to go over ground I have already touched on.

The axiom I have laid down with regard to the necessity for greater conservatism in bidding is not intended as advocacy of backward calling. There is no greater fault at either form of Bridge than consistent under-calling.

The main difference between the expert and the merely ' good ' player is that the former bids up to the full value of his hand, while the latter often underestimates his strength. I consider it waste of time to discuss mad over-calling by those who have no idea of values, or to enter upon a discussion as to whether this fault is worse than gross under-calling.

I am confining myself to the methods of good players, and I do say that the difference in skill between those who are inclined to under-call and those who are not is most marked. I should not be doing my duty to my readers if my advice to bid more conservatively at Contract than at Auction were not qualified in such a way as to ensure that it will not be taken as justification for the attitude of the nervous player who never bids his hand fully.

The over-cautious Contract player fears to make a bid lest his partner should get excited and put him up to a high contract for game. Penalties are so high that when the game was first played in America many hands were thrown in. Each player waited for one of the others to start the proceedings. If you had not a hand on which game seemed probable you passed. The others did the same thing, the result being stalemate and continuous dealing of the cards. The only antidote to this was the ' Goulash '.

I have already explained it. It is not Bridge, but it is great fun. In a ' Goulash ' deal the hands are so freakish

that there is little or no chance of them being thrown in. Among backward callers, therefore, the 'Goulash' is an essential part of Contract.

But in first-class Contract it is quite unnecessary. The advantage of being something up below the line is, as I have shown, very great—far greater than at Auction.

If, therefore, it is not possible to call game, the next best thing is to bid and make a contract of two by cards in no trumps or three by cards in a major suit or four by cards in a minor.

Failing this, any lesser contract bid and made may be of great value. The idea prevalent among beginners that it is no use bidding unless game seems probable is fallacious.

A game bid should be your first consideration ; but if in your judgement that seems unwise, go for the lesser 'plum'.

The psychological factor enters into Contract even more than at Auction. If you cannot trust your partner it is wise to under-call. If you know he will read any bid you make as an 'invitation' to bid game, your best course is to lie low. Otherwise you will find that instead of making a valuable score below the line of (say) 60 (three diamonds), you will lose (if vulnerable) 600, owing to the fact that your partner, expecting game on any hand on which you call, has put you up to 'five'.

In rubber game at Auction, if you cannot go game yourself, the next best thing is to incur, if necessary, reasonable loss in saving game. In these circumstances an anticipated loss of 300 may be justifiable.

If we consider the extent to which freak distribution may upset all calculation, it follows that on occasion the loss will be 400 or 500.

Moreover, here again there is the psychological factor to be taken into consideration. If you have a good partner and your opponents are poor performers, it may pay you to risk an anticipated loss of 400 or even 500.

In many circles it is considered that the Auction player

who incurs a penalty of 100 or 200 has *ipso facto* called badly. The very converse is often the case.

If by over-calling you can save rubber game cheaply, you have bid very badly if you do not over-call.

It is in this direction, more than any other, that the first-class player 'scores'. It follows that in first-class play penalties above the line are far more frequent than among mediocre players. Given 'the stuff', any one can bid for game, and get it, even if they play the cards badly.

But with a poor hand ability to judge how far one dare go in bidding to save game may make just the difference between success and failure. It is the same at Contract, only more so! Sometimes, nothing succeeds like excess.

With regard to the first or second game at Auction there is little to be said. No player should risk great loss in order to save game when his side are not a game up. I have pointed out that with a game against you the odds against winning the rubber are three to one, and penalties for failure to obtain a contract are the same for both sides.

In the second game at Contract the position is this. One side stand to gain heavily (rubber) and to lose heavily; the other side do not stand to gain heavily, but relatively they will lose much less. They should therefore put up a fight. Their possible loss will be small in comparison with the possible gain of their opponents.

Let us now look at the matter from the angle of the side which is vulnerable when their opponents are not. They know full well that if possible an attempt will be made to jockey them out of it.

The fact that their position is disadvantageous as regards penalties must not frighten them too much. Rubber points are worth 700, and they should not permit themselves to be baulked of rubber unless they can see their way to inflict a heavy penalty.

They should go for game all the time, but when they find themselves bid up to a dangerous position, they must abandon game and turn on their opponents. They will

make only 100 for each of the first two tricks their adversaries are ' down ', but 200 for each of the next two, and 400 in addition for the fifth and subsequent tricks ' down '.

I have often heard players express satisfaction when their opponents win a game. ' Now they are vulnerable,' they will say, and proceed to pick up their cards with the air of those who have the advantage on their side.

This is an exaggerated way to look at it ; but there is some basis for this attitude.

Both sides are out for game, but its achievement is not of the same importance to the non-vulnerable side. Therefore directly they see a chance they will stop bidding for game and turn on their opponents. They will double in the hope of inflicting heavy penalties.

If that chance does not come, and they go ahead for game themselves, failure by two tricks will cost them only 200, and failure by three tricks only 400.

If it becomes a question on either side of saving game the non-vulnerable side has an even greater advantage. Their adversaries can save game, but only at great cost, while they can save game at comparatively small cost.

It was Arnold Ward who said that at Auction the first game should be played in the spirit of the extreme right and rubber game in the spirit of the extreme left. The fact that this good advice does not apply to Contract is evidence of the great difference between the two games.

At Contract the spirit of the extreme left is no longer practicable in rubber game—the penalties for failure are too severe.

On the other hand, this spirit may often be manifested with advantage by the non-vulnerable side in the second game.

The man who has little, or comparatively little, to lose in a contest has always an advantage. The most should be made of the fact, but it should not be overdone.

I would remind readers that the penalties for wild calling can be heavy, even in the non-vulnerable position.

'Enterprising' players at Auction, intent on saving the game, occasionally go down 500 or 600.

At Contract, in the non-vulnerable position, a disaster of this kind would cost 1,000 or 1,400. It is true that a similar disaster in the vulnerable position would cost 1,800 or 2,200, but the vulnerable side are not likely to risk such losses, and therefore by over-calling to this extent the side which is not vulnerable is simply turning what is in a sense an advantageous position into one much the reverse.

Thus, though full advantage should be taken of the fact that the other side are vulnerable and you are not, this should be used with moderation and discretion. The absolute limit of adventure should be four tricks down.

This will cost 600, and it may save rubber points of 700 plus additional figures below the line, and possibly a score for honours.

Normally, however, a greater loss than three tricks 'down' (400) is not justifiable. While you may be saving 700, your side cannot get more than 500 for the rubber if you win it.

A similar loss by the vulnerable side would be 1,000. By incurring it they may save the game and thus retain the odds of three to one in their favour, but such a cost would be too heavy to pay to save the second game.

When we get beyond these figures the advantages of over-calling are absolutely lost by the non-vulnerable side, because the possible cost becomes too great and the chances of similar over-calling by the opponents become greatly diminished.

SLAM BIDDING

The rewards for slams bid and made are so great that it is essential for players to understand the correct methods of arriving at the desired end.

If you eschew set conventions, slam bidding becomes a very simple matter, requiring only common sense and a little card sense. Without prior arrangement of any kind

a slam signal should be capable of being recognized by any one who has played any form of Bridge for a week or a fortnight.

We have seen that at Contract, penalties for failure are high and that therefore bidding should proceed on conservative lines. Bearing this in mind, what are you to deduce when your partner deals and bids at love score 'Three hearts'? Obviously that he has strength and great length in hearts and a good hand on which he expects game. If you have one trick in your hand or two probable tricks, you should bid 'Four'. It is not a certainty; there are no such things; but it is probable that your one trick will enable your partner to make game.

Your holding in hearts is irrelevant. Even if you are chicane, you should bid 'Four' if you have an Ace. Your partner has, or should have, the hearts solid.

If you have no trick, obviously you pass. Your partner did not expect game without some support from you; otherwise he would have bid 'Four' himself.

There is only one other case to discuss. Suppose you have a good hand with more than one trick and several probable tricks. Do you bid 'Four hearts' or 'Five hearts'? Certainly not. You show your tricks.

Hearts are 'set'; that means that a decision that that suit is to be trumps has already been arrived at. It is clear that your partner must have about seven hearts (say) to the Ace, King, Queen. Therefore there is normally no object in trying to make another suit trumps.

Thus any bid you now make is a trick showing bid. If you have Ace of clubs and no other cards of value, you bid 'Four hearts'; obviously. But if in addition to (say) Ace, King of clubs, you have a good hand on which a slam seems probable, you bid 'Four clubs.' Any bid made at Contract shows strength. Your bid of 'Four clubs' therefore shows tricks in that suit. If you have tricks in your hand, why then did you not bid game in hearts? Clearly because you are out for a slam, and are feeling your way towards it.

If your partner has nothing more to say towards that end he bids ' Four hearts ', and it is then up to you again. If, however, he has (say) Ace of spades bare or no spade at all, he bids ' Four spades '. In that event you know that with hearts as trumps the only suit in which tricks can be lost is diamonds. You act accordingly. If you have losing tricks in diamonds, you bid ' Five hearts '. If you are chicane in diamonds and have some small hearts, you bid grand slam in hearts. If you have a single small diamond, and some small hearts, you bid ' Six hearts ' ; obviously.

Directly you have nothing more to say in the way of ' showing ' Aces or void suits, you bid hearts, and your partner acts in the same way. The contract will be ' Five hearts ', ' Six hearts ', or ' Seven hearts ', according to the strength or freakish holding of the two hands.

Could anything be simpler ? Any one who fails to understand this should stick to Auction ; obviously.

Set conventions will not help you. They are devised for (and often by) those totally lacking in card sense. They are not merely immoral in principle ; they defeat their own object because they make things so much more difficult and confusing. At Bridge you must play with your brains. Artificial codes will only make you still more fogged.

Anything may happen in a game of cards. Taking the example I have given, suppose you hold eight spades to the quart major or ten clubs with all the honours. In such a case the hand should not be played with hearts as trumps. Your course is clear. Over your partner's ' Three hearts ' you bid ' *Four* ' or more spades or ' *Five* ' or more clubs ; obviously.

Let me give an example.

Score—Z Y, 60, A B, Nil, in rubber game. Z (dealer) : Spades—9 ; Hearts—Ace, King, Queen, Knave, 8, 3, 2 ; Diamonds—Knave, 10, 8, 5, 4 ; Clubs—None. Y (Z's partner) : Spades—Ace, 4 ; Hearts, 10, 9, 6, 4 ; Diamonds —Ace, King ; Clubs—Knave, 9, 6, 4, 3 ; A B pass throughout.

Bidding by Z Y should be as follows :

Z, ' Three hearts ' ; Y, ' Four diamonds ' ; Z, ' Five clubs ' ; Y, ' Five spades ' ; Z, ' Seven hearts '.

Z has a hand on which game in a ' Two hearts ' contract seems certain. If he bids ' Two hearts ' and the opponents pass, that will probably be the final declaration, for normally it is unwise for one's partner to bid over a game-winning contract.

A two-suit hand such as Z holds is often stronger than one with a galaxy of Aces and Kings. Z is therefore justified in anticipating the possibility of a slam. For him to bid ' Two hearts ', and be left in, would be tame. If he bids ' Three hearts ', and finds that his partner cannot go on, he has increased the contract by one trick, but he has every hope of getting ' Three hearts '.

It is impossible to achieve big success if no risks whatever are taken. Moreover, Z's ' Three hearts ' bid has the advantage of shutting out an adverse bid of ' Two spades ' or ' Three clubs '.

Let us now consider Y's position. By bidding more than is necessary for game Z has invited slam bidding, and Y has a fine hand.

Y immediately realizes that it is now solely a question of little slam or grand slam. He should bid ' Four diamonds ', showing that he has no losing trick in the suit. If Z has more than two diamonds, Y with his trump support will be able to ruff the others.

Z now shows that he has no losing club by bidding ' Five clubs '. Y is now in a dilemma. If he bids ' Six hearts ', that will probably close the bidding, for Z cannot know where the Ace of spades is. Y has a losing spade, but he is justified in taking a risk in bidding ' Five spades '. He is not absolutely ensuring a bid of the grand slam in hearts. Z need still bid only the small slam.

The fact that at this stage Y did not bid grand slam himself will make Z cautious regarding the ' Five spades ' bid. If Y had no losing trick in spades he would certainly

have now closed the bidding at once by announcing ' Seven hearts ' rather than bid ' Five spades '. It so happens that Z has a single spade. This enables him to bring off the big coup.

In no other way could grand slam be bid with some measure of safety. In this type of bidding the main point to remember is that once a game bid has been called, or, better still, as in this case, a pre-emptive bid over game, subsequent bids by the partnership are trick-showing pure and simple. They are not ' take outs '. They are what is called ' come ons ' in the original suit bid.

I give another example on somewhat similar lines.

Score—Z Y, 90 ; A B, Nil, in rubber game. Z (dealer) holds : Spades—Ace ; Hearts—Knave, 9, 3 ; Diamonds—10 ; Clubs — Ace, King, Queen, Knave, 10, 7, 4, 2. Y (Z's partner) holds : Spades—10, 7, 6, 3, 2 ; Hearts—Ace, King ; Diamonds—Ace, 5, 4, 2 ; Clubs—9, 3.

A B pass throughout.

Bidding by Z Y should be as follows : Z, ' Three clubs ' ; Y, ' Three hearts ' ; Z, ' Three spades ' ; Y, ' Four diamonds ' ; Z, ' Seven clubs '.

Here again it is a case of many suits are called but only one is chosen.

Z Y are 90 up and therefore a bid of ' One club ' would give them game. In calling ' Three clubs ' Z is inviting slam bidding. He is taking no risks, because if his partner cannot go on he is certain to make nine tricks. He is merely saying : ' I want to try for a slam, but if you have nothing of real value I am safe for game in clubs.'

As will be seen, Y has a hand of great value, seeing that Z has announced nine tricks with clubs as trumps. The novice would jump to the conclusion that as Y has three tricks he should bid ' Six clubs '.

This would be wrong for two reasons : Z could never bid grand slam because he has three losing hearts and a losing diamond, and he cannot know that the opponents have not an Ace. The second point is that Y cannot know that

Z has not two losing spades. If he has, Z Y will not make ' Six clubs ' and they will miss game.

As in the former case, the correct way to arrive at a final decision is to name suits in which tricks are held or in which no trick will be lost. So long as partners remember that the final bid must be in the suit which was originally pre-empted no harm can be done.

In this case that suit is clubs, and Y in bidding ' Three hearts ' is not ' denying ' the clubs or showing length in hearts. He is merely saying that, as the hand is to be played in clubs, he has no losing trick in hearts.

Provided he has other quick tricks and some small trumps he would be justified in bidding ' Three hearts ' without a heart in his hand. The information thus given to Z is of great value—no losing trick in hearts.

Over the bid of ' Three hearts ' Z now shows that he has no losing trick in spades. Y is now justified in announcing his Ace of diamonds. It is true that he has losing cards in this suit, but at this stage it must be clear to Z that he has, for if he had not he, Y, would undoubtedly have now bid grand slam in clubs himself. It is left to Z whether to bid grand or little slam. As he happens to have only one diamond he is able to go for the big thing.

Some may say that this sort of bidding savours of convention, but it is not strictly convention : it is simply a matter of common sense. If a player pre-empts in a suit, particularly when, as in this case, he announces two tricks more than are necessary for game, it should be quite obvious that the hand must be played in that suit.

Subsequent bids in other suits therefore automatically become feelers towards a slam. Such bids must never be left in under any circumstances whatever. The moment that either partner feels he cannot give any further ' outside ' information he must return to the original suit bid.

In the case under review if Y had not held the Ace of diamonds, he must bid ' Four clubs ' over Z's ' Three

spades '. By bidding his hearts he has given all the information he can. Z then knows that a grand slam is out of the question, for he has a losing diamond. He calls ' Six clubs ', and that closes the bidding.

In this review of bidding at Contract, I am fully conscious of the fact that I have indulged in repetition.

A firm grasp of basic principles is however essential, and I make no apology.

For the rest, proficiency can only be attained by practice and observation at the card table.

CHAPTER XVIII

CONVENTIONS

FOR years past we have been fully aware of the various artificial bidding devices practised from time to time at Auction in the United States. We have steadfastly set our faces against them. The British view is, and always has been, that accredited methods of bidding and play must have a 'card sense' basis. Arbitrary standards, equivalent to hand signals or other mechanical arrangements, are anathema to us.

We have never permitted a player to blow his nose when he holds the heart suit, or to mop his brow when he has the spades. In principle there is no difference between such antics and the set conventions adopted in certain circles in America. As a result of our refusal to countenance this sort of thing we have continued to enjoy Auction and to regard it as a good game.

It is not many years since our partial adoption of the so-called 'informatory double' was hailed as a sure sign that we were at last abandoning our methods of play in favour of American innovations. But it was not really so. All we did was to adopt the American name for a practice which has a card-sense basis. The Americans are wonderfully adept at finding suitable names for various kinds of common-sense actions. We invent a thing; they give it a name and we all then acclaim it as something new from America. A typical example is 'The Squeeze'. We in this country have been 'squeezing' long before America took up the game seriously, but we did not call it that. We did not give it a name at all.

I remember in the old days of ordinary Auction when no trumps was 12 a trick, hearts were 8, diamonds 6, clubs 4, and spades 2, we had something very similar

to the informatory double. If my partner bid ' One no trumps ' and my right hand opponent bid ' Two diamonds ' over it, I could not bid ' Two no trumps ' unless I had the diamond suit stopped. If I had otherwise good support for the ' No trumps ' call and no length in hearts I bid ' Six spades '. As spades were two a trick we would only score 12 below the line if we got the small slam. It was therefore obvious that the call disclosed a good hand with no stopper in diamonds. No partner in his right mind would leave such a bid in, but we had no name for it. We did not call it ' the informatory six spades bid '. We just did it, and we assumed that our partners would understand. It was clear that if you could get a small slam in spades, counting 12, it would be of advantage to play the hand in no trumps (if possible) or in hearts. ' Two no trumps ' or ' Two hearts ' would be sufficient to over-call the bid of ' Six spades '.

THE INFORMATORY DOUBLE

Similarly, the practice described in America as ' The Informatory Double ' is not strictly *set* convention.

It is possible, of course, to produce a particular hand which will disprove any dogmatic assertion, but if you have a hand of great strength it cannot normally pay to allow the opponents to play it in their suit when the bid is no higher than ' two '. If an adversary bids ' Two spades ' it may reasonably be assumed that he has at least six spades and probably one or more outside tricks. He expects to get at least six tricks if the hand is played in his suit. If he is doubled he may go down 200. The man who doubles without a word from his partner on the chance of this must be very strong indeed—so strong that it is probable that he and his partner have a game hand if they can find their best suit. To forgo game on the chance of getting 200 cannot pay, and therefore normally any double of two of a suit should be taken out. To leave in a double of one of a suit

would obviously be even greater folly. Thus, according to the nature of his hand, the *first-class* player whose partner has doubled one or two of a suit will ' think aloud ' as follows :

(*a*) ' If, without a word from me, my partner is as strong as all that, the opponent who bid must have gone mad ; and my partner with the strong support I can give him will get at least 400. It is *obvious*, therefore, that I should leave the double in ' ; or

(*b*) ' I have something of value in my hand ' (or alternatively), ' I have a long suit, so if my partner is as strong as all that, it will pay us to go for game. If we play this hand in the opponents' suit, our score for penalties is not likely to be sufficiently large to justify us in forgoing a probable game. It is *obvious* therefore that I should make a bid ' ; or

(*c*) ' My hand, is worthless, and therefore, notwithstanding the strength of my partner's hand, the opponents may get their contract doubled. I don't think this is worth risking on the chance of a small penalty for us. My partner is probably hoping I have something, and I have not. The obvious course is to name my longest suit. It may help my partner. Should he have no strength in that suit he can take out my call. He must have at least one suit of real strength. In any case, I have done my duty by warning him that on my hand a double of so small a contract is risky. I might of course gamble on the chance of the hand being so freak that it would in fact be best to leave the double in. But in the long run I should lose a lot of money that way.'

If all players argued in this way, and thus if the course to be followed by the doubler's partner is obvious, the ' informatory double ' cannot reasonably be described as set convention.

In the case of the double of ' One no trumps ', the position is somewhat different, but the above principles still apply in some degree. This double is certainly more of a convention

than the suit double, and for that and other reasons I do not recommend its frequent use. In my experience cases seldom arise where a double of 'One no trumps' is advisable.

Recently I looked in at a club in a seaside town and listened to a most minute examination which another stranger was made to undergo from his partner.

Here are some of the questions he was asked :

'Is your double of "one" always informatory whether you or I have previously bid or not ?'

'Do you double two of a suit informatorily ?'

'If so, is it informatory only when neither you nor I have previously bid ?'

'What does your double of two mean when you have already bid yourself ?'

'Is it informatory only when I have not bid ?'

'If I double informatorily, and I am re-doubled, do you make a bid however weak your hand is, or do you leave the matter entirely in my hands ?'

'Do you double three of a suit informatorily ?'

'If I double informatorily, do you bid clubs if you have nothing of value in your hand, or do you name your longest suit ?'

The stranger was forced to answer all these questions, and he had also to listen to a full statement of his partner's practice. But his ordeal did not end there. At the end of the rubber another member cut into the table and drew him as a partner, and he had then to go through the whole thing again. He looked thoroughly harassed, and confided to me afterwards that, in his opinion, Columbus had done a lot of harm in the world !

I got so tired of listening to it all that I moved away and cut into a table myself to play a rubber. An attempt to cross-examine me then began. I cut it short by saying in my most severe manner : 'I play no conventions.' My

partner looked astonished, and implored me to take him out if he doubled one, two, or three, or whatever it was. I wasn't listening, but I said I would do as I thought best. That finished the argument.

CARD SENSE AND CONVENTION

The advent of American Contract has now raised again the whole question of conventions. They are, however, no more necessary or desirable at Contract than at Auction.

Every convention advocated for Contract is equally applicable to Auction. Contract being a new game, the convention-mongers are ' trying it on '. They will fail, as they did at Auction. Years ago they had several knock-out blows in this country, and they retired hurt. Contract, however, is a more difficult game and thus lends itself to suggestions, plausibly put forward, that set conventions are essential. The harassed beginner is told that if he adopts certain conventional methods of bidding his path will be smoothed and he will quickly become a good player.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The very converse is, in fact, the case. At Auction set convention is bad. At Contract it is worse. At the latter game there is so much more scope for skill of the card sense order. At Auction the mechanical player is at a disadvantage. At Contract he is, or should be, outclassed.

Conventions dull the imagination. They check initiative and enterprise. Contract is a better game than Auction because it gives more scope for judgement, imagination, initiative, and enterprise. These virtues have no place in the make-up of the mediocre player. Hence, the convention-loving maniac finds him a ready victim. The effect is cumulative. It is like a drug. The only antidote to the failure which inevitable results is more conventions. The more you have the more you will want.

At no time in the history of cards has the output of conventions been more profuse than it is to-day. Every week a new one is produced and acclaimed as the final road to success at Bridge. Apart from their stultifying effect, conventions cannot be successfully used unless they are fully understood and practised by the various partners with whom you cut.

When you have learnt and are able to practise mechanically ten conventions you will probably find not merely that your partner does not know them, but that he himself is indulging at your expense in ten different ones, none of which you have ever heard of.

Outside the sphere of cards, conventions have always had their uses in preventing stupid people who have an inordinate sense of shame from appearing ridiculous. Thus all weak-minded people who turn up at a party wearing a black tie when others are wearing a white one, feel awkward and uncomfortable. Similarly, no self-respecting sheep will fail to follow the example of the rest of the flock.

The result is that among men and women and sheep we have a fairly well-regulated code of conventions. It is capable of being understood by all. Many of those who follow it may be idiots, but they are not noticed as such. They are regarded as normal and sane because they are doing ' the right thing '.

At Bridge, however, there is no such thing as regulated method of procedure. Every player has his own conventions, and the result is chaos. From the material point of view this is the strongest argument against set conventions. The fact that they are essentially immoral, and that they tend to ruin any game of cards, is comparatively irrelevant.

The only kind of conventions which I would advocate at Bridge are those based on common sense and card sense. A fair simile is the well-known convention that diners should not eat peas with a knife. People think it might offend the hostess. The real reason, however, for this excellent convention is that peas are apt to slip off a knife,

and moreover, the use of a knife for this purpose is dangerous.

Many legitimate practices at Bridge can be justified by similarly good reasoning. They are not conventions ; but, unfortunately, that term, for want of a better word, has always been applied to them. Thus colour is lent to the idea that if one convention is permissible why not another ?

In common with most words ' Convention ' is a word that is loosely used. Every so-called ' convention ' at Auction, as played in this country, has a card-sense basis. By his leads and his play and his bidding every player does his best to give useful information.

If a man takes a Knave with the Ace it is fairly obvious that he has not the Queen. Thus the accepted or ' conventional ' method is to play the lowest card which will suffice to take a trick.

From Ace, King, and others, the King is led. The fact that it is not taken by the Ace is some indication to the partner that the Ace may be held. If the Ace were led there would be no guide whatever as to the probable position of the King. Therefore the ' conventional ' lead is the King. From King, Queen, the lead is King. It is obvious that a King should not be led out unless there is something behind it. When, therefore, the King is taken by the Ace, the Queen is disclosed in the leader's hand. If the Queen were led first there would be no guide to the position of the King.

Thus the lead of King from Ace, King, or from King, Queen, is so obviously right that it has become standardized. The result is that many players act accordingly without knowing why. Thus has arisen the idea that this and other recognized leads are conventions.

The lead of the fourth best against a no trumper is no more set convention than any other recognized lead. Obviously the leader's best chance in defence is to lead from his longest suit. Without touching honours, it is clear that a high card should not be sacrificed.

It follows that the lowest (of four) should be led. The partner knows that you will lead from a suit of at least four cards. If, therefore, you play subsequently a card lower than the one you led, it follows that originally you had more than four. Thus the lead of the fourth best has a simple card-sense origin. The eleven rule is merely a mathematical calculation arising from it.

The ' call ' or ' echo ' is merely a matter of card sense. If my partner leads a King and I play a 9 on it, it is obvious I cannot have many of the suit. He may have the Ace, 10, and be able to see the Queen in dummy. He has therefore a right to put me with Knave only, or none at all. If I subsequently play the 2 on his Ace, it is still obvious that by my play of the 9 I had gone out of my way to convey the impression that I was short in the suit.

This sort of thing is card playing. It is not done by arrangement. Some well-known writers still speak of the call as the ' peter '. The latter is an old whist expression. It was convention pure and simple, quite as bad as any of those now advocated. The peter was a call for trumps. If you wanted your partner to lead trumps, you played ' high and low ' in any suit. Thus the peter bears no relation to our modern methods of inducing a partner to proceed with the suit he has led.

One writer, in his attempt to justify set conventions at Contract, says that Auction is packed with conventions. He gives as an example the fact that a player will bid originally ' One heart ' on Ace, King, Queen, 2 ; but will pass on a hand containing seven hearts, headed by the Knave, 10, 9.

He says that the second hand with hearts as trumps is nearly always worth more than the first, and cannot be worth less. He therefore concludes that the bidding is a ' convention ', requiring the original bidder to have top honours.

There is no convention about it whatever. By all the laws of card sense and common sense, it must be wrong to

open the bidding without a trick in your hand. If the original bidder can be sure that the hand will be played with hearts as trumps, then he is safe to bid ' One heart ' on seven to the Knave, 10. But how can he be sure of it ?

The original bid should obviously announce tricks, whatever the final declaration turns out to be. If your partner eventually bids ' Four spades ' and is doubled and you put him down the Knave of hearts, he has some right to feel aggrieved. But if you have Ace, King of hearts, that is all he can expect.

To use the word ' convention ' to describe an original pass on a hand containing seven hearts headed by Knave, 10, while using the same word to denote the ' one club, one diamond ' procedure of the Vanderbilt code is obviously fantastic. To such lengths will they go when they have a bad case !

NO MONKEYING

None of the examples I have given are in any sense mechanical or artificial conventions. They bear no relation to the outrageous practices recommended by some exponents of American Contract.

An original bid of ' Two clubs ', with the intention of conveying that you have length and strength in spades and hearts, has no conceivable card-sense basis. It is childish in the extreme and offends against the first principles of card playing.

In the one case your efforts are capable of being understood by any good player whom you meet for the first time. In the other it is necessary to explain beforehand exactly what your proposed antics mean. In short, you are either an intelligent person who wants to play cards or an idiot who wants to fool away the time practising humbugging signals.

Even in the nursery, I remember, when playing at being other people, some sort of attempt was made to represent

them. No child on this side of the Atlantic would think of dressing up as Cromwell with the set arrangement beforehand that his playmates were to regard him as Queen Elizabeth. There would be no fun or sense in it. He would be regarded as stupid, and they would not play with him. Yet at Contract we are asked to play with silly, grown-up children.

Strictly speaking, a convention is a method of procedure where the object is to convey or receive information which cannot be imparted by ordinary card-playing methods. Card sense, common sense, deduction, initiative, flair—all these things are put on one side. There is a set arrangement equivalent to a player touching his right elbow or placing his left hand flat on the table.

His partner, having been advised beforehand exactly what these antics mean, responds accordingly. If he is unable to go on with the game in the ordinary way, he, too, touches his elbow, thereby giving further information.

The convention-monger who bids ' Two clubs ' may not have a single club in his hand. It is simply an artificial signal.

It is therefore the bounden duty of the partner to take out the bid into spades or hearts, whichever suits him best. He may have three spades to the 9 and three hearts to the 8 and nothing of value in his hand. He must call ' Two spades '.

Thus the man who bids ' Two clubs ' has (probably) nothing of value in clubs, and every one knows it ; and the man who bids ' Two spades ' over it has (possibly) nothing of value in spades, and every one knows it. After these preliminaries the real bidding begins ! This is set convention—a typical example of what the word really means.

British players have refused to adopt this convention. They have recognized its essential stupidity. It was invented by mediocre minds for the purpose of inducing imbeciles to believe that if they practised it they would be recognized as players of knowledge and skill. A moment's

reflection will show that at best it is unnecessarily cumbersome.

Exactly the same result could be attained by introducing legislation permitting the dealer to say : ' Partner, I have length and strength in spades and hearts, I pass,' and his partner would then be allowed to say : ' My spades are better than my hearts, I pass.' The dealer would then start the bidding. This is the straight way of dealing with the matter, and I recommend it to those who, having the ' beggar-my-neighbour ' mind, prefer to play Bridge.

I fear, however, that it would have a depressing effect on their dupes, for the idea that there is something clever about it all could hardly survive. Yet there is, in principle, not the slightest difference between the two methods. My way is the simpler, because it would involve only knowledge of the laws which are available for all, whereas the other method means study of some book or other, with the disadvantage that an odd partner or two may not have read the same treatise.

There is a further course which might satisfy both types of half-wits, the writers and their victims. We could have a convention whereby a player who has spades and hearts touches his left elbow when he says : ' I pass.' This might make the village idiot think he was doing something clever. At any rate, it would show that he had bought and read the book. Thus, there would be a profit for some one.

Moreover, this method is capable of unlimited extension. There is at present (November 1929) no conventional way of showing that you have spades and diamonds, hearts and clubs, spades and clubs, or hearts and diamonds. My suggestion could be made to cover these situations and many others. There is the right elbow and there are other parts of the body available. A whole book could be published dealing with the matter on these lines. Any one who learnt the code by heart would be recognized at once as a first-class player.

I was interested in a statement which appeared recently

in *The Times*. The writer's view was that ' as Contract depends entirely on the ability of two partners arriving at an understanding of the best winning declaration, the temptation to give a conventional bidding value to every possible hand becomes nearly irresistible.'

I have yet to learn that in this connexion Contract differs in principle from Auction. At both games success depends on arriving at the final declaration which best suits the two hands. If, therefore, set bidding conventions are necessary at Contract they are desirable at Auction. The fact that at Contract there is usually more bidding cannot be held to justify the adoption of conventions which are not ' irresistible ' at Auction. If you cannot achieve your object at Contract by ordinary card-sense methods you will not do so at Auction either. In that case your best course is to give up any form of Bridge.

Snap is a more enjoyable game than Auction Bridge or Contract Bridge with set conventions, and there is more skill in it. You have to be quick-witted.

The very latest convention to be talked about in this country is the ' One club ' bid. The author of this device is Mr. Harold Vanderbilt. His name was not unknown, but he has now achieved real fame. If you have a hand which looks ' slammy ' you bid ' One club '. Whether or not you have any trick in clubs is irrelevant. You may even be chicane in that suit. If your partner has anything of real value he bids it. He would, of course, do this in any case. If he has not, he bids ' One diamond '. Obviously when you have a good hand there are occasions when it would be advantageous to you to hear your partner bid first. There is, however, no law facilitating such an arrangement. You are not allowed to scratch your head when ' passing ', thereby conveying that you have a big hand. Nor are you permitted to say outright, ' Partner, I pass, but you must give me the chance of bidding on the second round.' Mr. Vanderbilt has found a way out of this unsatisfactory state of affairs. He has succeeded in

evading the law, and in some quarters he has accordingly been hailed as a genius worthy to rank with Edison and Einstein.

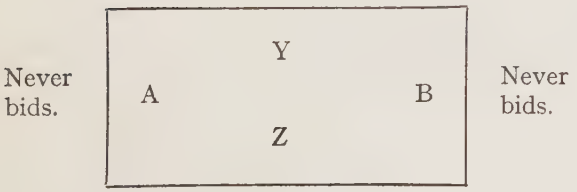
His ' One club ' bid has the sole meaning, ' Partner, give me another chance of bidding.' No one with a bad hand would make such a demand. Obviously therefore when he does it he has ' the stuff '.

In the absence of an intervening adverse bid his partner has now to take a hand in the proceedings. If he has a bad hand on which he can not make a normal bid, he says, ' One diamond.' This simply means, ' I can't bid, but you have asked me to give you a second chance, so here you are.' So far, no information with regard to clubs or diamonds has been given by anybody.

I wonder how it is that Marconi never thought of this ? The farcical part of the business does not, however, stop here. Even when the partner has a normal bid he is not permitted to make it unless his hand contains two ' quick ' tricks.

I take an example from Mr. Vanderbilt's book (' *Contract Bridge* : ' Bidding and the Club Convention ') :

♠—10, 7, 5, 4, 2.
♥—A, Q, 9, 7, 5, 4, 3,
♣—3.



♠—A, K, 8.
♦—A, K, 8, 6.
♣—A, K, J, 8, 7, 2.

Here Z dealt and bid ' One club '. It will be seen that you are permitted to bid ' One club ' even if you have strength in clubs. Y is, however, not allowed to bid his hearts because he has not two ' quick ' tricks ! He must bid ' One diamond '. What a game !

Z now bids ' Two no trumps ' !

This is a further convention. It is described as a ' forcing bid '. If Y has a five card suit with no card of value in it, or a four card suit ' headed by not less than a Queen with some outside assistance, he must bid his suit over Z's ' Two no trumps '. I hope readers have not already become confused. Personally, I feel that notwithstanding the big hands held by Z, Y, I would prefer to be A or B. It seems to me that if Z, Y go on long enough with this humbug they are almost sure to make a mess of it.

In the book of course, as in the nursery stories, no disaster occurs and Z, Y live happily ever afterwards.

Y turns out to have a seven card suit. He bids ' Four hearts '.

For the first time during the proceedings some one makes a genuine bid and we are permitted to imagine that we are playing Bridge.

Z now bids ' Four no trumps '. Y, realizing that Z has a very big hand but without support in hearts, ' tries ' the spades. He bids ' Five spades '. Here we have a good call without any conventional meaning. This bid may surprise some players, but it has good card sense and would be made by any first-rate performer. Z then bids ' Six spades ', and by very good play he gets it. I admit to feeling exhausted, and I am sure my readers must be equally tired. I have, however, just sufficient strength left to point out that (as usual) the same result would have been arrived at by using ordinary common-sense methods. The bidding should have been as follows : Z, ' Three clubs ' ; Y, ' Three hearts ' ; Z, ' Three no trumps ' ; Y, ' Four spades ; Z, ' Six spades '. In this ordinary bidding, there is less risk throughout, and above all no chance of the mess

which every convention-monger usually makes of the conventions he practices.

There is no limit to gullibility, and sure enough this ' One club ' convention has found favour among certain West End players.

The legitimate bid of ' One club ' and the legitimate bid of ' One diamond ' over it have their uses. Why knock them out ? The simpler and more intelligent way of arriving at the desired end would be on the lines I have already advocated. We could have a new law worded roughly as follows : ' When a player has a good hand he may scratch his head when passing. If his partner then fails to bid, he shall have the right to bid again.'

Or what about ' Un trefle ' on a good hand and ' One club ' to convey a normal club bid ?

This could be regarded as erudite, for it would proclaim the linguist.

I make no apology for dealing with this question at some length. Mr. Vanderbilt has written a whole book about it. He explains his wretched convention uncommonly well. He is a fine player, said to be one of the best in the United States. Moreover, he is the originator of the present method of scoring at Contract. Thus there is some danger that players in this country may become impressed with his ' One club '.

If they do, it will be good-bye to Bridge as we understand it.

This particular convention is but the thin end of the wedge. One step from the path of righteousness and we shall be overwhelmed with ever-changing artificial devices.

Players in this country are not alive to the fact that at this moment we are ' at the parting of the ways '. If they do not sit up and take notice, they will find that against their will, and surreptitiously without their noticing it, set conventions have crept in. Then it will be too late. These conventions will be introduced into Auction also.

The greatest danger is the ' One club ' bid, because a number of our prominent players, forgetting that up to now they have held reputations for card sense, have supported it and adopted it.

One would imagine that the chief advantage lay in the opportunity given to the partner to bid on less than normal strength.

The strangest thing about the convention, however, is that the partner is not permitted to take advantage of the information conveyed. He must not bid unless he has two ' quick tricks '.

If he has two ' quick tricks ' he would normally bid anyhow, so what can be gained by the ' One club ' bidder ? The whole thing is a complete farce.

If your partner has two ' quick tricks ', he will support any normal bid you make. If he has not, and you bid ' One club ', he bids ' One diamond ', the sole meaning of this, as I have explained, being ' I have not two quick tricks '. You are then back to where you were before and you have gained nothing.

There is a school which claims that the end justifies the means. They cannot be ' One clubbers ' because, however unprincipled the means, there can seldom be any object to be gained.

Those who practise the ' One club ' convention may, however, gain an indirect advantage. When they bid ' One no trumps,' it is clear that they have a doubtful call. It is the equivalent of bidding ' half no trumps '. If they have a good ' no trumper ' they bid ' One club '. It follows that their bid of ' One no trumps ' discloses a poorish hand. Warned in this way, the partner hesitates to support, even if he has two ' quick tricks '.

I have just been having a chat with a friend recently returned from the South of France. He played a rubber or two with three Americans, all good players. Opportunity for use of the club convention arose four times. On the first occasion, the convention-mongers missed game and

rubber, solely as a result of using this convention. On the second and third, they scored a slam which would have been made with greater safety with bidding on normal lines. On the fourth, they went down 1,400 !

POINTS OF VIEW

A few months ago Mr. Vanderbilt's proposals would have been treated with scant courtesy. Even to-day that would have happened had he been an Englishman of the name of Smith or Brown.

Let me explain what I mean.

I was here and still am. Then there was my good friend Hugh Elliot. No one who reads his instructive articles on Bridge can fail to be impressed and entertained. He has made himself a power in the Bridge world. To my great delight I noted that he had set his face against artificial conventions. ' United we stand——' I thought, and I felt happy.

I had good reason for my confidence in him. A few months ago he wrote : ' Let us do all we can to keep out artificial conventions. They cannot but damage the game ; they are not at present being played in London, and there is no tendency to start them. Why not keep the game in a pure state, when any one can play it by the mere use of common sense ? A crop of technicalities is bound to repel the average player. If they are adopted the game ceases to be vital and becomes mechanical.'

It might well be imagined that I am the author of this statement. I am not. It was written by Hugh Elliot. Let me give another extract from his writings : ' Artificial conventions are the bane of cards. They imply so much more to be learnt by heart and so much less scope for the imagination and initiative.

' They are no part of the real game, but are parasitic on it, and in course of time inevitably destroy it. Contract Bridge, if it is to be generally adopted, should contain a

law prohibiting conventions, for without that it can have no final stability or permanence.'

In the same article in which the above appeared Mr. Elliott proceeded to discuss the 'One club' convention. He announced that he had received 'an interesting letter from a gentleman who desires to introduce a new convention.'

After describing it, Mr. Elliot said: 'Without discussing whether the convention would pay (and conventions, unfortunately, do pay), I can only reply that I think any such convention would be to the disadvantage of the game. A bid of "One club" should mean "One club". It should not mean something else which has to be explained at the beginning of the rubber to your partner, and therefore of course, also to your adversaries.

'Supposing it is advantageous to bid "One club" conventionally, then if every one took it up no one would be any better off than before, for the advantage to each side would cancel out, while there would always remain one more convention to be learned, or one more explanation to be made, before sitting down to play.'

This is forcibly and expertly put. It is real common sense on lines I have myself always followed.

Even when it became clear that Mr. Vanderbilt was the author of the 'One club' convention, Mr. Elliot at first stuck to his guns. In a subsequent article describing 'The Vanderbilt Club' he said: 'I have no doubt that, like so many of its predecessors it will soon be modified or disappear altogether. *After considerable experience of it, I cannot recommend it.* As a whole, English Contract remains free of conventions. If it is to retain its popularity it must remain free.'

This latter statement was published only last July.

It will be seen that I had every reason for satisfaction that my campaign against set conventions was ably and strongly supported. Indeed, I felt that, with Mr. Hugh Elliot on my side in this matter, we in this country were

safe. There was little or no chance of the introduction of these childish practices.

But what a startling change has since come over the scene! We have Mr. Elliot coming forward as a staunch supporter of the 'One club' convention. He has even attacked me for condemning it!

Mr. Elliot made great play with the suggestion I made in the *Star* and in the *Graphic* that it would be fairer and less humbugging for a player to be allowed to scratch his head when passing, this gesture giving him the right to bid again. He appeared to think I was proposing something for myself. He said that scratching one's head is an automatic sign of mental confusion and of being puzzled.

Obviously, however, I was only suggesting an alternative method for those who cannot play cards without the aid of set conventions.

Readers of Mr. Elliot's recent eulogies of the 'One club' convention are referred back to his other statements reproduced above. Is it any wonder that some of us are puzzled and confused?

AMERICANA

Lord Castlerosse recently stated: 'Even in small things like Bridge, Americans take the lead and we follow. They gave us majority calling, they invented also Contract Bridge, and now they have invented the club convention.'

America is notorious for self-advertisement. Their greatest achievement in this direction, however, is a knack of getting others to advertise for them. Exaggeration forms the basis of many advertisements, but this particular one is hopelessly inaccurate.

They play majority calling at Auction in America, but I am not aware that they have even attempted to 'give' it to us. If Lord Castlerosse will allow his mind to wander from the environment of three or four clubs situated within the

purlieus of St. James' he will find himself compelled to admit that majority calling is not played in this country. Thus a ' gift ' from an unexpected source has not been accepted.

The statement that Contract Bridge was invented by America is wrong. What the Americans have done is to alter the game. In my view they have improved it. They have introduced features which tend to shorten the rubber.

Contract, as played for many years past in France and other continental countries, is not suitable for clubs. It takes too long.

As amended by the Americans it is a great game, and I hope that in due course it will be played in this country.

At the moment its progress here is slow. To say that we have followed America by adopting Contract is quite inaccurate. We have done nothing of the sort. If I may regard my native land as something more than two or three West End clubs, then the game being played by ' us ' is not Contract but Auction.

As for club convention, it has not been adopted here, and never will be. ' We ' have too much common sense and no little card sense. We must not be too disheartened at some of the support this convention has received.

America gave us jazz, and personally I like it. I should, however, be quite prepared to accept Sir Edward Elgar's technical opinion about it, and I can quite imagine what that would be. Sir Edward knows something about music.

Another pernicious convention is that a pre-emptive bid of two in a major suit is a stronger call than ' Three ' or even ' Four '. The idea is that the former shows length and strength in the suit and considerable strength outside, whereas the latter shows length and strength in the suit and nothing of value outside.

In some circles the ' Two ' bid indicates the possibility of a slam.

The partner is compelled to bid over it even if he has nothing of value in his hand.

This is the practice in certain circles in America. It is convention gone mad.

If you have a game hand with a possibility of slam you should obviously bid game, or one over game, and leave it to your partner to go on if he has anything of value.

What conceivable advantage can be gained by bidding ' Two ' when you have a bid of ' Four ' or ' Five ' ? It can only be for convention's sake. It is not even to the advantage of the novice or the player who lacks card sense. Any beginner can automatically realize that he should bid high on a big hand. Why should he be forced to memorize that he should bid low ?

Mr. Sydney Lenz has published a whole series of what he calls ' demand ' bids. The word ' demand ' means that your partner has to bid no matter what the nature of his hand. One of the ' demand ' bids is any original suit bid of ' Two '. As one example, Mr. Lenz causes Z to bid ' Two diamonds ' on six diamonds to the Ace, King, four clubs to the Ace, a single spade, and two small hearts. There is nothing extraordinary about this ; it is a perfectly sound bid. The real fun arises (that is, for those who have no sense of cards or sense of humour) when it is Y's turn to bid. Y has three small spades, five small hearts, two small diamonds, and three small clubs. As he has no natural bid, and Z's bid is ' a demand ', we are told that Y should bid ' Two no trumps '. Some mouthful !

The attitude of some of the convention-mongers towards slam bidding is surprising. They condemn what they describe as conventional methods. Here they are wrong. I do not mind any so-called convention so long as it has some sort of card-sense basis. Slam bidding certainly has.

That of the kind given on page 172 in the previous chapter is in a sense the equivalent of the informatory double of one of a suit.

I have explained that no player in his senses would normally leave in a double of one of a suit whatever

the nature of his hand. On the face of it, it could not pay.

Similarly, when, as in the case in point, it is obvious that clubs is the business, it would be madness to leave in any other call.

A bid may be read in two ways—positive and negative. If you bid ' One spade ' it means that you have strength in spades, that is, that you will make tricks in that suit. If, however, you bid spades when you already know that clubs are to be trumps, you are still in a sense announcing strength in spades, even if you have not one in your hand. Once a contract begins to get big you should count your losers rather than your winners. You should consider how many tricks the adversaries may get. Therefore if you have some small trumps (clubs) and no spades in your hand you have a legitimate right to bid spades because your ' strength ' in that suit is quite as good as if you held Ace, King.

Supposing one of your adversaries has bid spades originally and your partner invites slam bidding with clubs as trumps. If you have no spade you should announce the fact at once by bidding spades yourself, otherwise your partner will never dare to bid a slam. Your adversary has announced tricks in spades, you counter it by also announcing tricks in that suit; that is, you are obviously saying: ' Don't worry about his spades; he won't make them.' Thus slam bidding of this kind is merely common-sense.

It is easy to test whether a practice is set convention or not. When it is not, the partner is free to use his intelligence and act accordingly, as in slam bidding. When it is, the partner has to follow prearranged procedure. Thus it is the partner of the freak caller on whom devolves the obligation of carrying out the code. I have no objection whatever to an original bid of ' One club ' on a hand containing nothing in clubs, but I protest strongly against the set arrangement that the partner bids ' One diamond '

over it when he has a poor hand and nothing of value in diamonds.

My view is that American Contract is a great game, provided it is played in the way that all card games are played in this country. We play Auction without adopting arbitrary and conventional methods. Cannot we play this new game without becoming involved in them ?

My advice is, however, unnecessary. The British public will never stand for the sort of thing I have described. They have always disliked humbug. They are not likely to take to it now.

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